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JULY 1999 VOL. 80 NO. 7

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The International Journal of Film & Digital Production Techniques

Features

36 Sci-Fi Cowboys
Wild Wild West lives up to its title

48 High-Tech Noon
ILM lends flamboyant panache to *West* effects

54 Island of Lost Souls
Limbo reteams Sayles and Wexler

66 Flower Power
Sixties values blossom in *Wildflowers*

78 A Few Bad Men
The General's Daughter examines a military mystery

86 Hip Cinema
L.A. Indie Film Fest showcases up-and-comers

96 A Classic Last Stand
They Died With Their Boots On tells Custer's tale

54

66

Departments

10 Editor's Note
12 Letters
14 Post Process
18 Production Slate
103 Short Takes
111 New Products & Services
115 Points East
117 Books in Review
119 Living Pictures
120 Classified Ads
126 Ad Index
127 From the Clubhouse
128 Filmmakers' Forum

78

On Our Cover:
Special agent James T. West (Will Smith) cuts a slick figure as he battles a maniacal supervillain in *Wild Wild West*, an action-packed adventure directed by Barry Sonnenfeld and photographed by Michael Ballhaus, ASC (photo by Bruce W. Talamon, courtesy of Warner Bros.).

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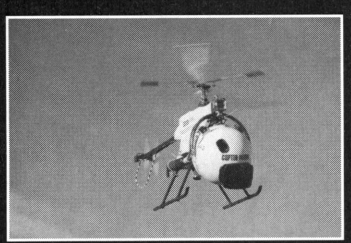

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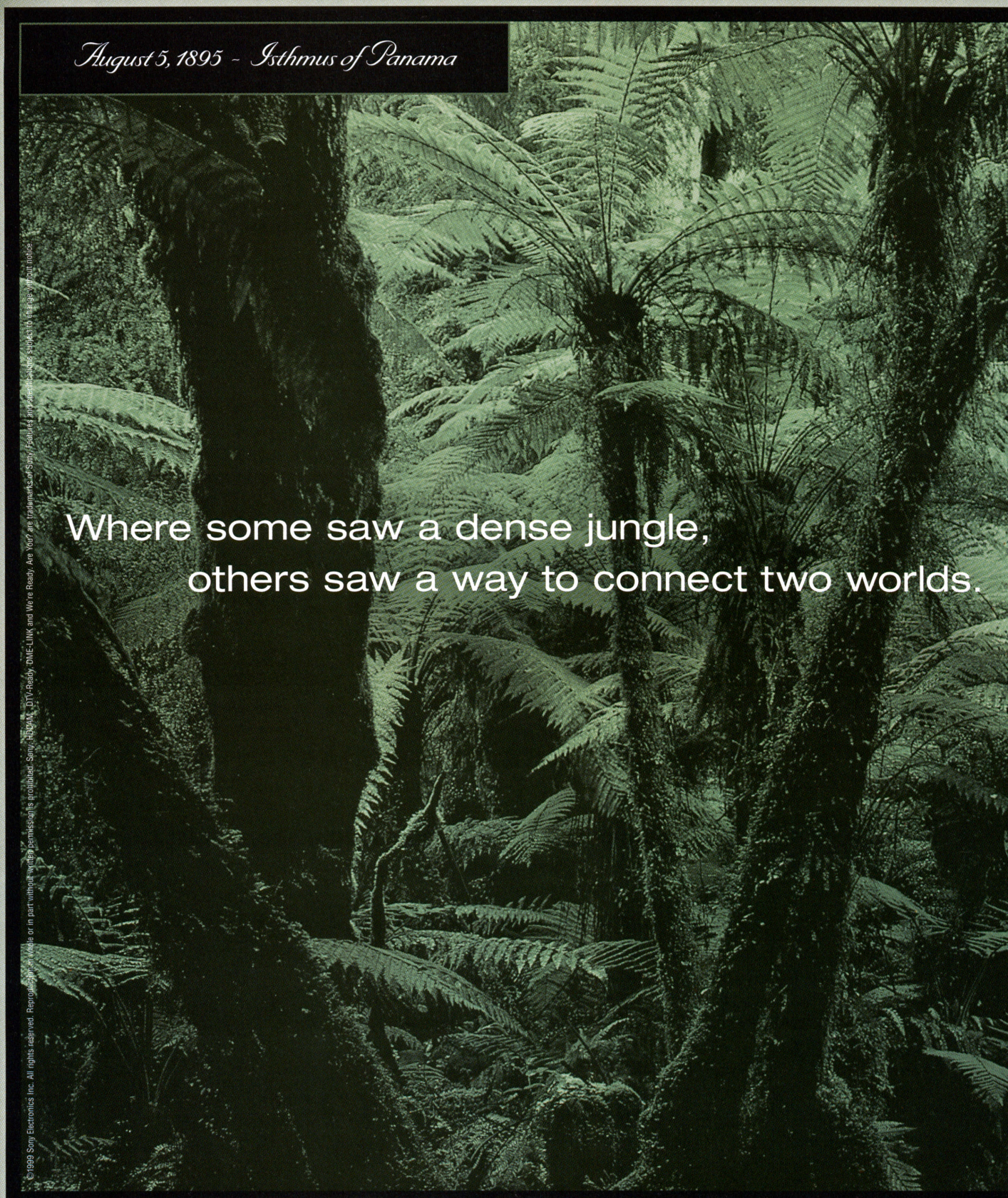

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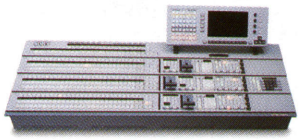

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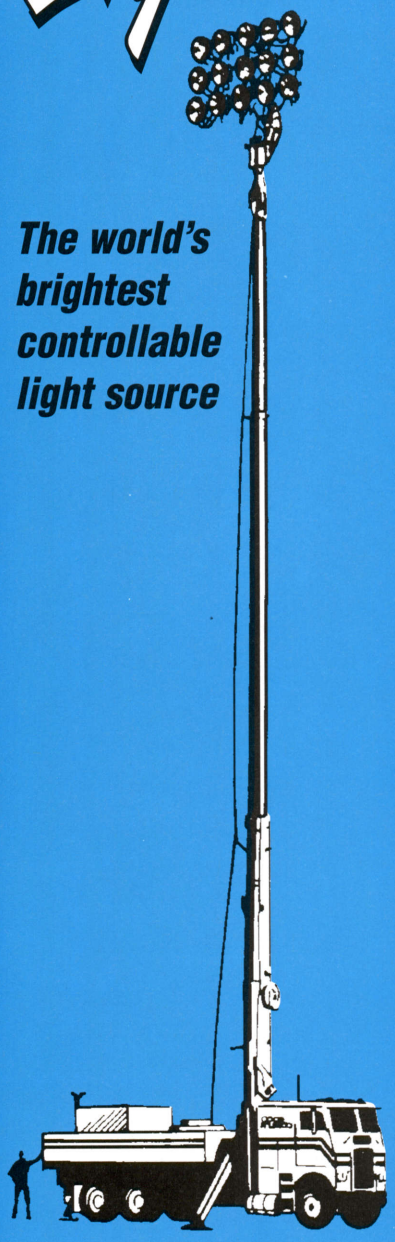

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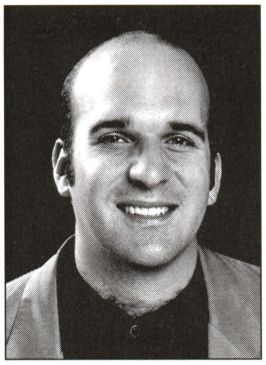


When I was still in short pants, superheroes ruled my world. Batman was my first obsession, and I spent many a day planted in front of the tube — same Bat time, same Bat channel — anxiously awaiting my idol's exploits. I developed an equal admiration for *Star Trek*'s Mr. Spock, whose infallible logic and emotional control always impressed me more than Captain Kirk's hammy hand-wringing. Soon enough, however, James Bond ascended to the throne of my esteem. Deadly efficient and cool in a crisis, always ready with a quip or one of Q's lethal weapons — yep, 007 was The Man.

The only problem with Bond was that in those pre-VCR days, I was forced to endure a starvation diet in the span between a new theatrical release and the rare airings of his adventures on ABC's "Sunday Night Movie" (occasions which often involved tedious bedtime negotiations with my parents). Into the breach strode Special Agent James T. West, whose spurs jangled daily in reruns of *The Wild, Wild West*. Very shortly, actor Robert Conrad convinced me that West was the coolest cowboy on the planet. He had it all: gadgets, gorgeous babes, and a brainy sidekick named Artemus Gordon. What more could a grade-schooler want in a hero?

West has finally returned in *Wild Wild West,* Barry Sonnenfeld's eccentric retooling of the cult television series. Stylishly photographed by Michael Ballhaus, ASC (page 36), this big-screen bonanza features both the jaunty Will Smith and an array of amazing effects by ILM (page 48).

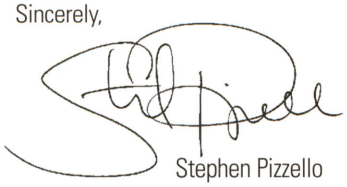
This issue's other blockbuster, *The General's Daughter* (page 78), tells a dark tale of military misdeeds. Director Simon West and cinematographer Peter Menzies, Jr., ACS have cloaked the film's all-star cast in an appropriately ominous ambience.

To balance things out a bit, we've included coverage of several smaller but thematically substantial films. Beginning on page 54, Conrad Hall, ASC interviews old friend and colleague Haskell Wexler, ASC about the latter's work on *Limbo,* the latest drama from thoughtful auteur John Sayles. We've also asked Paul Ryan, ASC about his duet with first-time director Melissa Painter on *Wildflowers* (page 66).

Rounding out this edition of *AC* are articles on the fifth annual Los Angeles Independent Film Festival (page 86) and the epic 1941 Western *They Died With Their Boots On* (page 96).

Fans of the late, great Stanley Kubrick needn't worry about the absence of the master's final film, *Eyes Wide Shut,* from this issue. Kubrick's untimely passing has inspired us to delay our coverage until October, when we will salute the director's brilliant career with a special tribute.

Sincerely,



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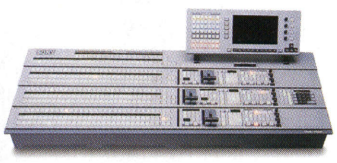

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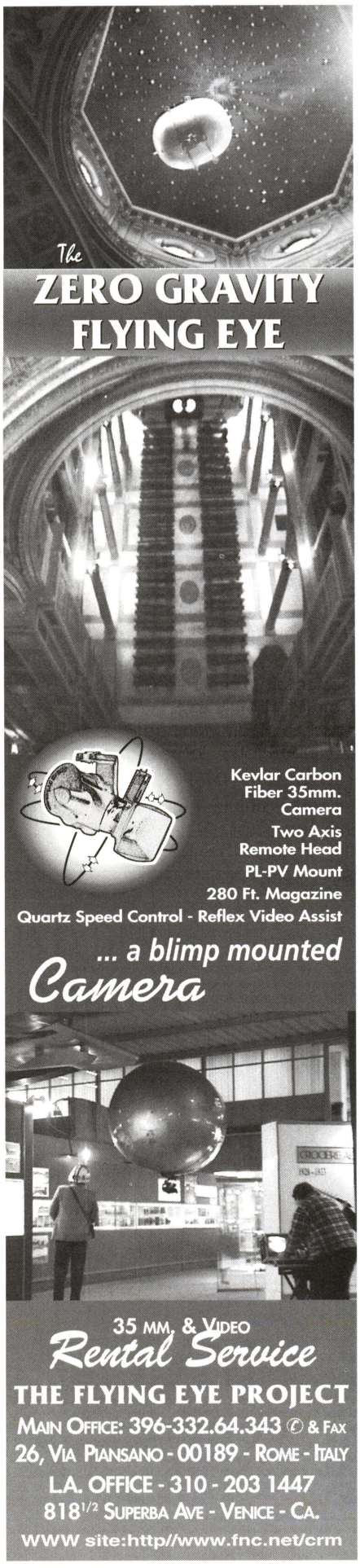

Letters

Reading Between the Lines

I enjoyed the story about how the cinematography effects were executed on *The Matrix* ("Welcome to the Machine," April '99), but something the author said jumped off the page and doesn't make any production sense. He states, "With the complex requirements of the film's serpentine narrative and the grandiose environments and events the Wachowskis had envisioned, the producers decided to shoot the entire film in Sydney, Australia."

Excuse me, but are American script supervisors not intelligent enough to follow a "serpentine script," and are not the numerous soundstages in Los Angeles, New York, Atlanta, Miami, etc. adequate for filming "grandiose environments"? This is clever writing to disguise the real reason the producers (not the directors or the cinematographer) decided to shoot in Australia: money. Everyone who works in this business is well aware of the problem of "runaway" productions lost to Canada and Australia, and the financial reasons for it. To try to sugarcoat and deflect the truth behind the reality is insulting — it would have been better if the author had not tried to reason away the producer's decision than try to fool us.

— Stacey R. Strickler
Via e-mail

The author of the Matrix *piece,* AC *technical editor Christopher Probst, certainly did not set out to mislead or misinform our readership when he wrote the line in question. Experienced industry professionals will certainly grasp the statement's implication — that the decision to shoot in Australia was based partially on cost efficiency — but perhaps further clarification would have helped.*

Errata

In our recent April coverage of *The Terrorist* ("Sundance '99: A Cooler Climate"), we mistakenly quoted cinematographer Santosh Sivan as saying that he greatly admires the work of fellow Indian cameraman "Subroto Deb" (page 112). Sivan was actually referring to director of photography Subatra Mitra, who shot many pictures for Satyajit Ray, including *Pather Panchali* and *Charulata.*

On page 132 of May's New Products section, due to a typographical error, we erroneously reported that Eastman Kodak's Vision 800T high-speed color negative is *not* available in the 16mm format (7298), when in fact it *is.*

In the same section, our item on Schumacher Camera's new Revolution lens (pp. 137-8), states incorrectly that the device has a field lens. In fact, the Revolution *does not* have a field lens, which is one of its primary advantages over conventional snorkel lenses. As the company's product release states, "The image transmitted through the lens system at no point becomes focused near a lens surface, whether shooting at extreme close focus or infinity. This means that users will no longer have problems with dust ruining the shot by becoming focused in the frame."

In our June issue, the name of cinematographer Tom Priestley, Jr. was misspelled throughout the article about his work on *The Thomas Crown Affair* ("Smooth Operator," p. 54).

AC regrets these errors and any inconveniences they may have caused.

Next Month in *AC:*

The Haunting
Director:
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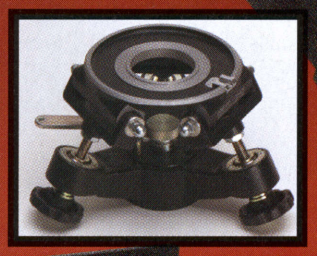

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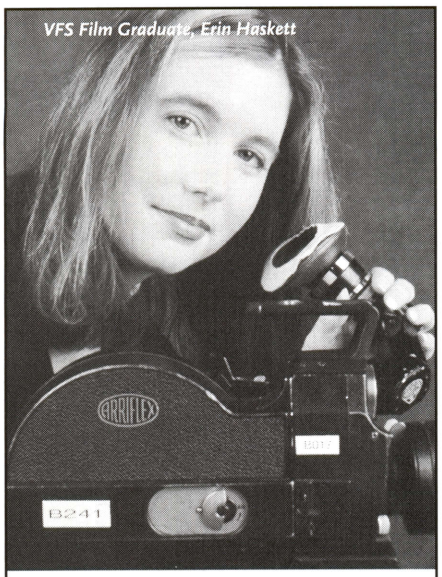

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The Post Process

A New Option for Indies

by Debra Kaufman

Century City's CEG Post aims its services at the independent filmmaker. The small facility grew out of parent company Creative Entertainment Group, a production outfit that got its start in 1993 and made a name for itself with infomercials, commercials and music videos. (In 1998, the firm won the Electronic Retailing Association's award for Best Corporate Infomercial for its work on a spot showcasing Kodak's DC-210 digital camera.)

Creative Entertainment Group co-founder Dan Lowenthal is a feature-film editor as well as a director, and he continued editing even as CEG began to hit its stride as a production company. It was a natural move to add an Avid for offline editing and, later, an Avid Media Composer 8000 for online work. The firm has since upgraded to an Avid Media Composer 9000 with broadcast-quality AVR 77, and also offers a 3-D effects board with numerous graphics tools, including Boris FX, Adobe After Effects for compositing, and Beta SP or Digital Betacam source options. Offline facilities include two Avid Film Composers (System 7.0 and 6.5) and other non-linear film editing suites.

After acquiring its first Avids, the company's next step was to offer its extensive equipment and expertise to outside clients, and CEG Post began providing services for music videos, infomercials and commercials. However, given Lowenthal's roots in feature film work, CEG Post soon focused on motion pictures, particularly independent films.

The company's new tack got a big boost in July of 1998, when Douglas Salkin was hired as its first in-house post supervisor. A freelancer for five years, Salkin's credits as a supervisor include numerous independent films, including Andrzej Sekula's *Fait Accompli*, Anne Goursaud's *Embrace of the Vampire*, and Michael Nolin's *Wildly Available*. As a freelance sound supervisor, Salkin has lent his skills to the ABC series *The New Swiss Family Robinson* and director/actor Vin Diesel's *Strays*.

With Salkin aboard, CEG Post quickly honed its ability to offer post for independent films. "Facilities are changing to service features in a different way," explains Salkin. "You don't need the older model of the big company that has major investments in high-end technologies. You can have smaller companies that service large projects, because the cost of the workstations and tools we use have really come down."

CEG Post offers a range of services to indie filmmakers. For those simply looking for an editor, the company boasts four on-staff editors with extensive film and television credits: Dennis O'Connor (*Zero, Ballad of the Nightingale, Fait Accompli, Traffikking, Executive Power*), Peregrine Beckman (*Unconditional Love, Point Doom, Whatever It Takes, Lolita 2000*), Suan Toon Yeo (*Shopping for Fangs*) and Kathy Pienaar (South African television), as well as Lowenthal.

CEG Post also offers a package aimed specifically at independents that includes postproduction supervision, a line item often required by bond companies. Explains Salkin, "Indie filmmakers often can't afford the weekly cost of a postproduction supervisor, so we fold it into the whole cost of post."

One project that's taking advantage of the full CEG package is *Zero,* the directorial debut of Aaron Mendelsohn, the writer of *Air Bud* and *Air Bud 2*. CES Post is handling all postproduction duties for the indie coming-of-age comedy. Lowenthal and Salkin are serving as post co-supervisors on the project.

Continued on page 16.

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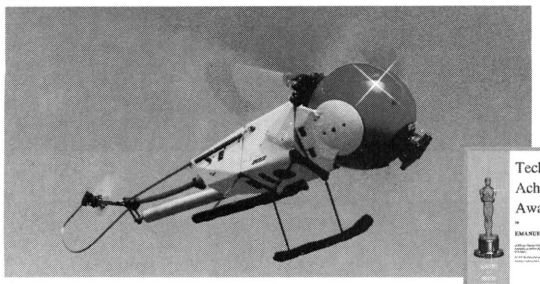

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Salkin also supervises services that he subcontracts out to other companies, including telecine dailies, film processing and printing, dialogue and effects sound editing, ADR, foley, sound mixing, answer prints, and final telecine to delivery master. Salkin notes that he only uses well-known facilities with good reputations and offers clients a number of options. "I take them shopping around to a few places and ask them what they think," he says. "I use any lab in town, based on the budget of a show. For telecine mastering, we can use places like Sunset Post or FotoKem. We also use Entertainment Post; it's strictly a dailies telecine house, and does great work."

In addition to post supervision, CEG Post provides no-obligation postproduction budget reviews, and frequently sends personnel to the set to ensure adequate coverage. "We have a staff of people who back me up, so they not only get the power of a post supervisor, but everyone at CEG Post, from scheduling to coordination and delivery personnel," explains Salkin.

Independent filmmakers can often be overwhelmed by information about digital visual effects, HDTV and digital filmmaking. To Salkin, this is another reason to utilize the services of a one-stop shop like CEG Post. He notes, "If the director is spending his time writing and shooting, he's certainly not spending his time investigating new technology."

Salkin's favorite tip for independent filmmakers is that postproduction needn't be a budget-breaker. As new technology trickles downward, it becomes more affordable, and Salkin makes it his business to know which high-end techniques have come down in price. "What I do is demystify the process," Salkin says. "In independent cinema, you're talking about a lot of first-time directors. They're putting their heart into the film, but they don't necessarily know how to translate their vision into the technical processes of postproduction. My experience lets me work with these people and translate their creativity into the language that the telecine house, the color timer and the sound editor can understand." ■

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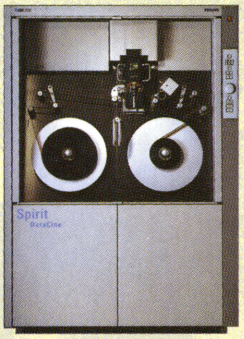

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compiled by Andrew O. Thompson

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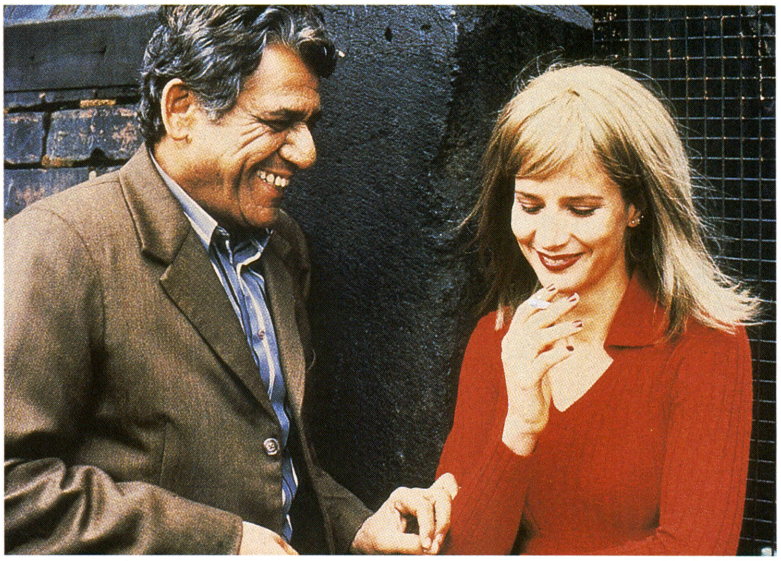


Pakistani taxi driver Parvez (Om Puri) enjoys a laugh with working girl Bettina (Rachel Griffiths) in *My Son the Fanatic*.

Photos by Joth Shakerley, courtesy of Miramax Films.

A gulf between generations and cultures is the backdrop for *My Son the Fanatic*, a new film from director Udayan Prasad (*Brothers in Trouble*) that's based on a screenplay by Anglo-Pakistani writer Hanif Kureishi (*My Beautiful Laundrette, Sammy and Rosie Get Laid, London Kills Me*). When his beloved young son, Farid (Akbar Kurtha), begins acting strangely, Parvez (Om Puri), an intensely assimilated Pakistani cab driver in Northern England, suspects illicit drug use. Through his work among the local night populace, Parvez has become quite cozy with a young prostitute, Bettina (Rachel Griffiths), and he consults her about the tell-tale signs of addiction. Her insider information proves useless, however — it's actually fundamentalist Islam that has young Farid so fixated. With customary late-adolescent fervor, Parvez decides that everything is right with his new calling and wrong with his adoring father.

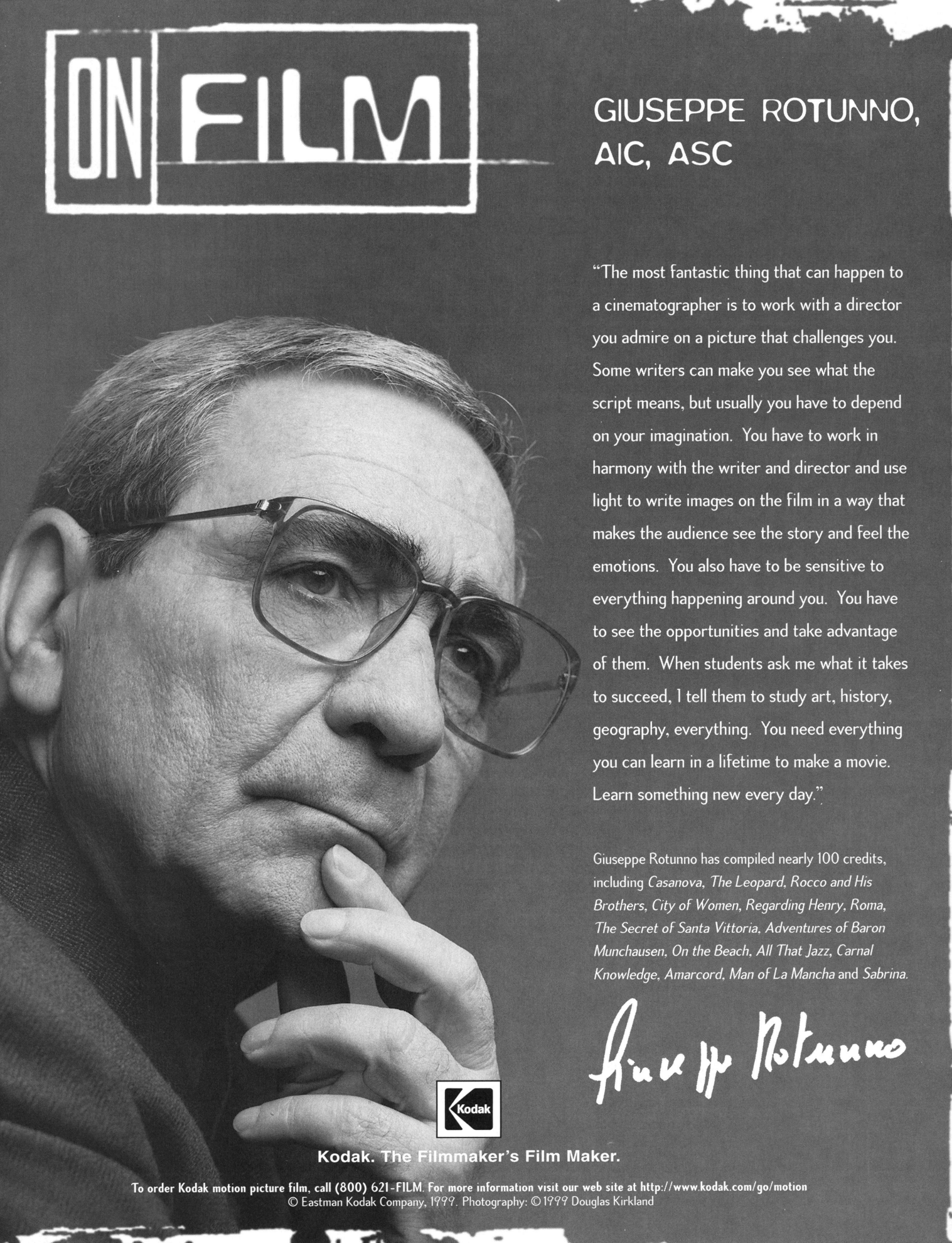
As the story unfolds, we learn that Parvez has been driving a cab in the town of Bradford for 25 years. A moderately corrupt fellow, he's more comfortable ferrying prostitutes or swilling whiskey in his dingy basement than spending time with his quiet wife, Minoo (Gopi Desai). We also learn that prior to his religious conversion, Farid was an attractive and successful student engaged to marry the daughter of the local, British-born police chief, much to the constable's dismay. One of Farid's first acts as a fundamentalist is to break off this promising pairing.

Soon after, a licentious German tourist named Schitz (Stellan Skarsgard) comes to town and uses Parvez as his entree to the local sin scene, accelerating the sorry state of father-son alienation. In order to placate Farid, Parvez allows Maulvi, a Muslim priest, to stay at their home with his entourage.

Director of photography Alan Almond (*Get Real, Brothers in Trouble*) has brought his penchant for realistic, hard-edged visuals to this £2 million tale of familial conflict. From Almond's point of view, the story, director, cast and milieu were all well-matched. "Udayan Prasad and I are great friends, and we've worked together often," says the cameraman. "He likes to collaborate very closely with his cinematographers, and has a good idea of what [his films] should feel like — though not necessarily what they should look like. We talk about the patterns of light and color that should run throughout the piece, and how framing can help express what is going on in the story. This may sound pretentious, but I try to apply a very simplistic approach to all of my work — I'm not a technical person, and I'm not interested in high-tech approaches or solutions."

According to Almond, the realistic handling of light is a key component of his cinematographic style. "I like to aim light through vertical windows and let it bounce off of horizontal surfaces, such as tables or the floor. The light coming in from the windows is my key, and my fill is often side- or backlight and the reflected light from the table or floor — it's a natural, organic approach. Because I feel strongly about this type of lighting, I try to get as involved as possible in the selection of locations. If I can't get good backlight and some horizontal surfaces for reflections, I'd rather not be there."

In the case of the Parvez home, Almond had the luxury of working on a studio set, which he lit mainly with tungsten sources aimed through windows. Inside, he employed as few additional lights and reflectors as


ON FILM
GIUSEPPE ROTUNNO, AIC, ASC
"The most fantastic thing that can happen to a cinematographer is to work with a director you admire on a picture that challenges you. Some writers can make you see what the script means, but usually you have to depend on your imagination. You have to work in harmony with the writer and director and use light to write images on the film in a way that makes the audience see the story and feel the emotions. You also have to be sensitive to everything happening around you. You have to see the opportunities and take advantage of them. When students ask me what it takes to succeed, I tell them to study art, history, geography, everything. You need everything you can learn in a lifetime to make a movie. Learn something new every day."
Giuseppe Rotunno has compiled nearly 100 credits, including *Casanova, The Leopard, Rocco and His Brothers, City of Women, Regarding Henry, Roma, The Secret of Santa Vittoria, Adventures of Baron Munchausen, On the Beach, All That Jazz, Carnal Knowledge, Amarcord, Man of La Mancha* and *Sabrina.*
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Above: A reluctant Parvez acts as chauffeur for his son Farid (Akbar Kurtha) and members of his fundamentalist Islamic sect. Lower right: Parvez and Bettina confront their intense feelings for each other.

possible. "Of course, I try to work with the director, but to get the lighting to work best for me, I'll also try to pull the actors to the spot where the light looks right for most of the scene," the cameraman notes. "If a character needs to be front-lit for the purposes of the scene, I'll usually try to pull the camera around so the window is behind us, rather than rearranging the lighting."

This somewhat unusual approach stems from Almond's distaste for photography that looks *too* perfect. "I can't stand seeing films where the photography is so perfectly composed and lit that you say 'Oh, that's a nice shot.' I find that it distracts from what you're watching, so I try never to do that. To me, the most important thing is lighting that's appropriate to the storytelling, rather than a look that's flashy or beautiful for its own sake. Having said that, one of my favorite films is *Blade Runner* [photographed by Jordan Cronenweth ASC], which is a beautiful example of good lighting. Although the look is intensely stylized, it's not distracting because it is perfectly appropriate to the story."

Another key setting for this taxi driver's tale is, of course, the cab itself. No fixtures were ever placed inside the vehicle. For nighttime scenes, Almond positioned fixtures outside the towed auto's windows for a look convincingly close to documentary realism. "I put six or so small lamps — ranging from 350 to 650 watts, each gelled with a different color — outside on the car trailer. They were hooked to a dimmer board, and to simulate the headlights of passing cars, my gaffer brought them up and down. It was a simple solution that avoided that huge sort of glow that seems to come from the dashboard or the floor [in some other films]."

For night exteriors, Almond tends to deploy a large single source, "usually a backlight for a strong basic image. That's easy to do, and it looks good — you get lots of light and dark that way. I then play with other sources, making arrangements with nearby residents to put a light in their window. They're usually quite keen to do it, but not when it's 4 a.m. and 98°F in their sitting room!"

Almond also eschews almost all filtration, even standard color correction. He notes, "Without filters, one can do much more in grading [timing]."

He facilitated his naturalistic approach by photographing on Kodak's Vision 500T 5279 film stock and using the fast Panavision Primo T1.9 primes. "5279 is a contrasty stock that helped give the film a meaty, hard-edged look, especially in combination with the Primos, which are very hard lenses."

Operating with a Panaflex G2 as his A-unit, Almond's camera rarely moves in *My Son the Fanatic* unless it's following the actors. Oddly enough, Almond shot handheld for as much as 20 percent or more of the finished film. "Udayan likes a handheld camera even if it is *not* a scene with camera movement. He and I both like the suggestion of movement and a sort of instability, which you can get just by having the camera on your shoulder and breathing. That can be enough to suggest something edgy without being too distracting."

In terms of finessing the actual setups, Parvez's positioning within the frame became a crucial element. Prasad relates, "This character is a long-married man who is in crisis: he has fallen in love

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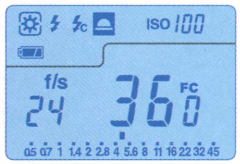

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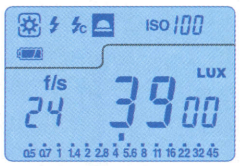

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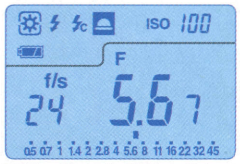

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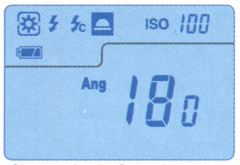

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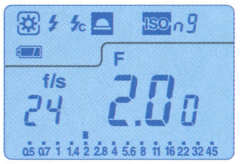

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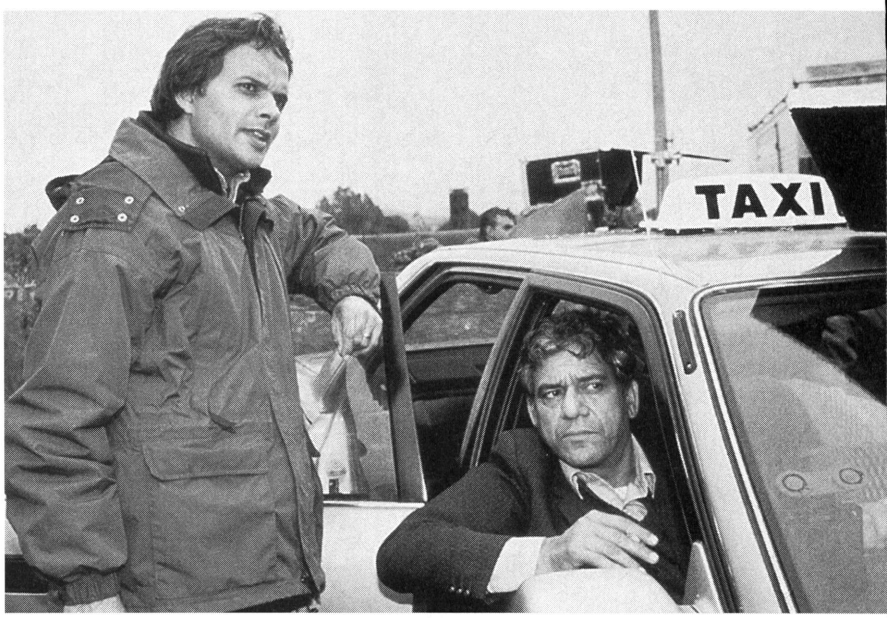
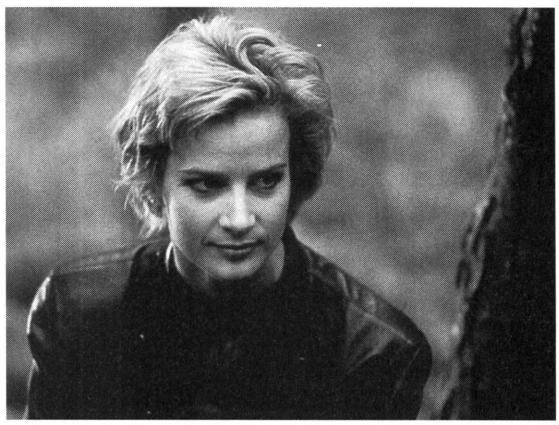


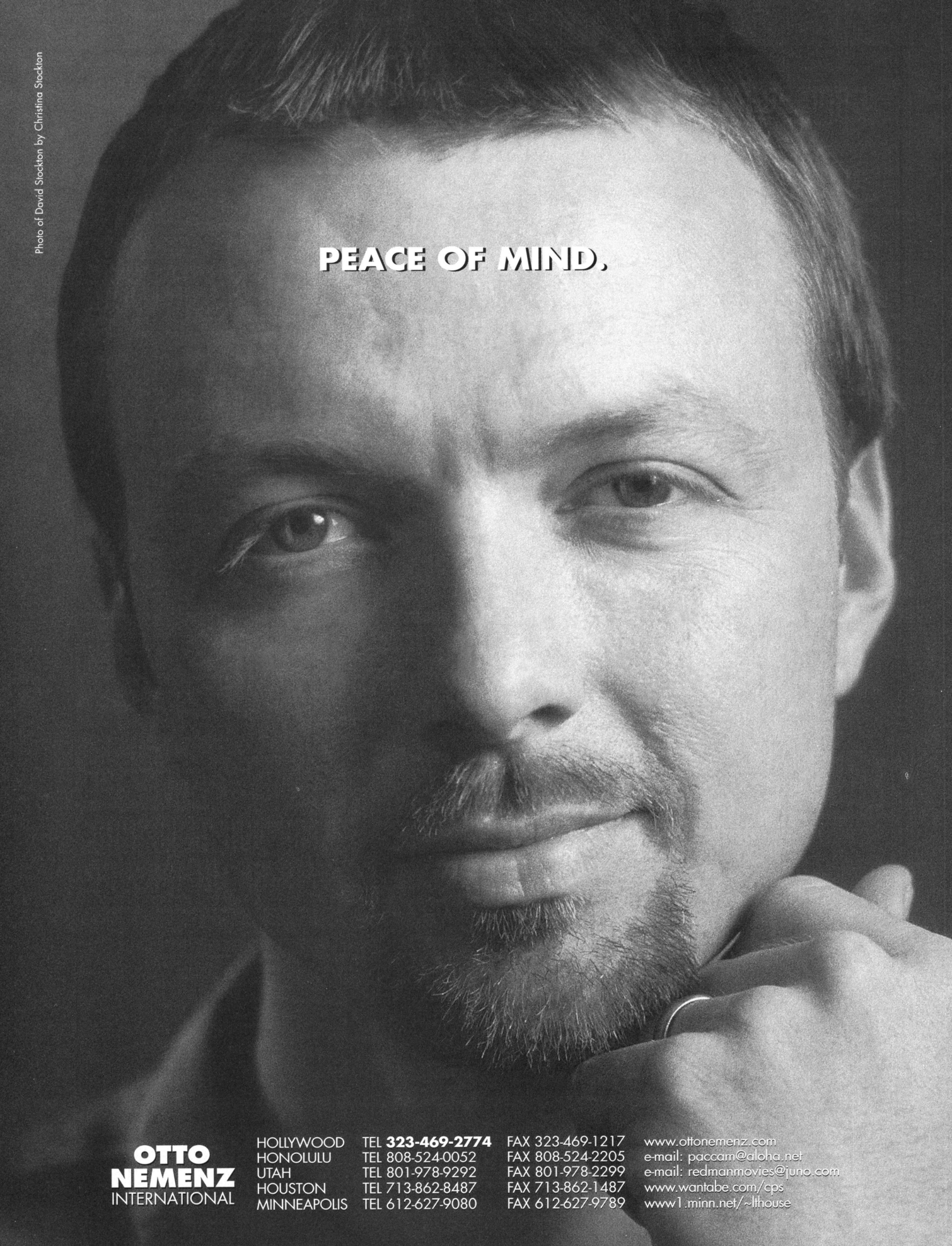


Above: Director Udayan Prasad discusses a scene with revered Indian actor Om Puri. Right: Bettina begins to reconsider her life choices.

with a young prostitute, and his son is suddenly a religious fanatic. Parvez's conflicted point of view was therefore very important, so we tried to present the story in the disoriented way in which he might be seeing and feeling things. We decided that it was important to frame Parvez uncomfortably, to keep him out of that 'golden third' [of the frame], especially as he becomes more disoriented from everything he has long held dear."

Prasad singles out a scene in which Parvez comes home after a tryst with Bettina, only to find his son sleeping in the hallway as the religious leader rests in Farid's bed. If that sight isn't enough of a shock, he then receives a rather stern greeting from his wife, Minoo. Surrounded by hostile parties, Parvez is positioned low in the frame. "We wanted to be looking down on Parvez in this scene to show his diminished status in his own home, how he has to fight to hold his own," explains Prasad. "Being above him with the camera also suggests that he's being watched surreptitiously by Minoo, who enters the scene from the left. As he exits the frame, we're still looking down slightly on her — she is framed hard over on the left, quite uncomfortably — to help reflect the messiness of his situation."

A low-tech approach also figured into the film's costume design. Almond and Prasad determined that red hues would only appear in clothing worn by Bettina and Minoo. "As the story progresses, Bettina's red clothes become brighter and more intense," the director points out. "As Minoo's prominence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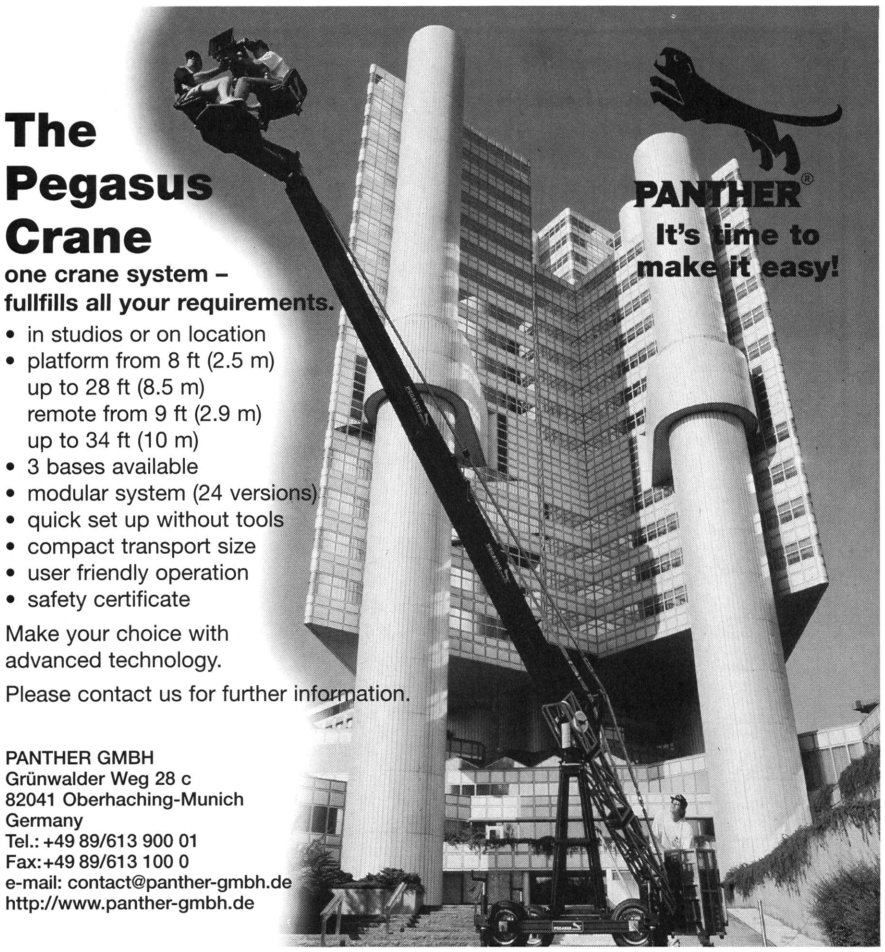

decreases in Parvez's life, her clothes, which start out as a brownish red, become more muted and autumnal."

Prasad's unified approach to visuals — a fortified alliance between cinematography, art direction and costuming — is especially crucial, given his modest budgets. Almond comments, "We have to compete with mainstream American films, which take longer to make, cost more, and are a much jazzier product. We can't do that sort of production, because we don't have the money or the time. We have to get our act together in order to compete and satisfy audiences, and convince them that our production is in fact a feature film. Udayan's approach of being very open with his ideas about the films' look is a big step in that direction."

The project's short 42-day schedule was ameliorated somewhat by the fact that lead actor Om Puri, who appears in almost every shot, is a major star in the wildly prolific Indian film industry. Having made literally hundreds of features, this seasoned professional lent *My Son the Fanatic* much of its dramatic strength. Says Prasad, "Om tells of working on two or three films in Bombay at the same time, going from one set to the other on a given day. As a result of such demands, Indian actors are incredibly professional. You give them a mark and they hit it every time without being distracted by that need for precision. Om Puri is very good and very consistent; he worked harder than anyone, and at the same time, he was terribly understanding about the challenges of everyone else's job."

To illustrate the intimate working relationship he shares with Almond, Prasad recalls their first collaboration, on *Brothers in Trouble*. "You get tired doing these low-budget films, because you have to work really fast and long hours. At one point on *Brothers,* I was particularly tired, and I said to Alan, 'For this scene let's just shoot it from here and here.' He replied, 'We've never done anything like that, what about all of our discussions about the philosophy behind the filming? Surely the camera has to be not where you're suggesting, but over

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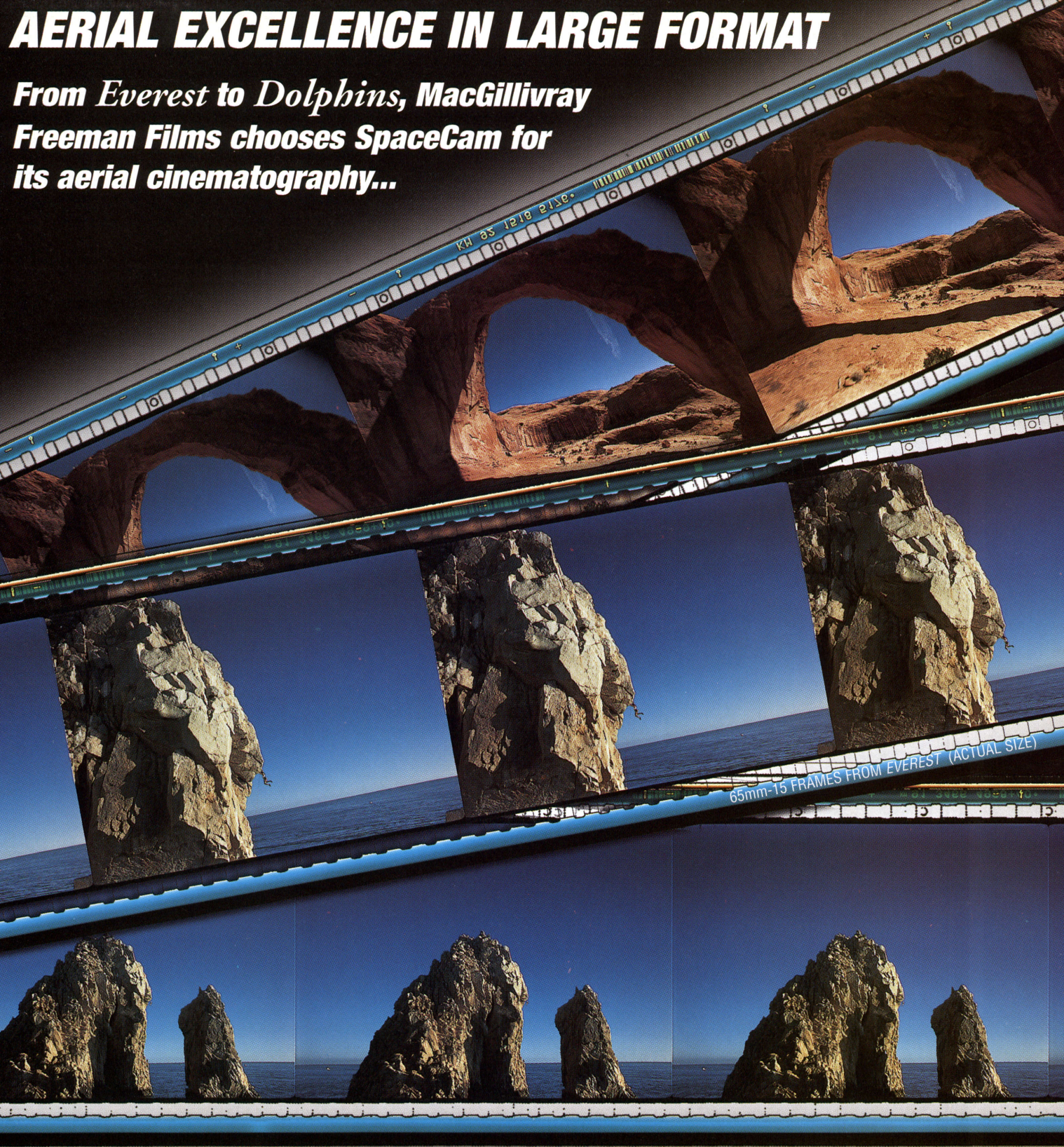

From Greg MacGillivray, the Producer & Director of ***Everest*** *and* ***Dolphins*** *(March 2000)...*

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here.' He was absolutely right, and I immediately realized that I'd broken my own rules. I said, 'Thank God you're wide awake, Alan!'"

Late-Night Humor in HDTV
by Debra Kaufman

The Tonight Show had its initial airing in HDTV on April 26, marking another first in the annals of NBC history: the network that pioneered regular color programming and led the vanguard in stereo sound became the first to present a regularly scheduled high-definition program. Making the switch from analog NTSC to digital HDTV was a collaborative effort between NBC and Sony that resulted in completely new HD facilities and HD-trained camera people.

Sony Systems Integration vice president Chris Summey submits, "The goal was to be unobtrusive to the show in its daily operations as we made changes to the physical facility, as well as to [create a seamless broadcast] for an audience [used to standard-definition]. Jay Leno has a very popular show with good ratings, and NBC didn't want to do anything that would [adversely] impact the look or feel of the show."

If Leno's comments after the first HD tapings are any indication, their efforts succeeded. "Nothing has changed, I just have to wear pants now," joked Leno. During the premiere HD show, the acerbic host took a wry jab at HDTV by describing it as "Betamax Part II," a sharp remark that surely caused some Sony executives to shift uneasily in their seats.

Indeed, from Leno's point of view, HDTV has changed virtually nothing. When one wag from the press wondered if some celebrities might be hesitant to appear in HDTV's high-resolution spotlight, Leno riposted that he'd never encountered a problem luring stars onto his show.

To attain a flawless format transition, NBC and Sony began working together a year ago, when Charles Jablonski, NBC vice-president of Broadcast & Network Engineering, made the decision to go with the 1080i HD format. With the announcement of the two firms' Digital TV strategy, NBC entered into an agreement with Sony to develop broadcast products and applications for the next five Olympic Games. An extension of that agreement led to a similar partnership for the HD broadcast of *The Tonight Show.*

One concern about the television industry's switch to HDTV is the lack of format-friendly programming. NBC cemented their commitment to HDTV by taking the popular *Tonight Show* into the new standard, an announcement made at last year's NAB. According to Summey, one of the reasons *The Tonight Show* was chosen was that the show would ensure the broadcast of continual, fresh material in HD. (At present, the majority of HD programming consists of Hollywood movies newly transferred to HDTV.)

Since most people would still be viewing *The Tonight Show*'s HD broadcast in standard definition, NBC planned to tape the show in high-definition (broadcast in 1080i via the SVS4 transponder 6) and also downconvert it to NTSC (broadcast through the Genesis digital network system in New York). Currently, all of the commercials running with the show are also in NTSC. Upconversion of the commercials and show graphics to HD are accomplished via a mix of YEM HSC-1125 D1 and Snell & Wilcox upconverters.

To engineer the switch from NTSC to HD without skipping a beat, NBC and Sony made cautious plans and moved in carefully calibrated steps. On the acquisition side, *The Tonight Show* was equipped with Sony's High-Definition Video System (HDVS) HDC-700A and HDC-750A studio cameras, as well as the HDW-700A HDCAM camcorder for the show's out-of-studio remote segments. Within 60 days of Sony's agreement to build a new system, the company provided NBC with portable HD equipment the network could begin "equipment orientation" for *The Tonight Show* staff.

In early March, NBC spent a week tearing down the old control room so that

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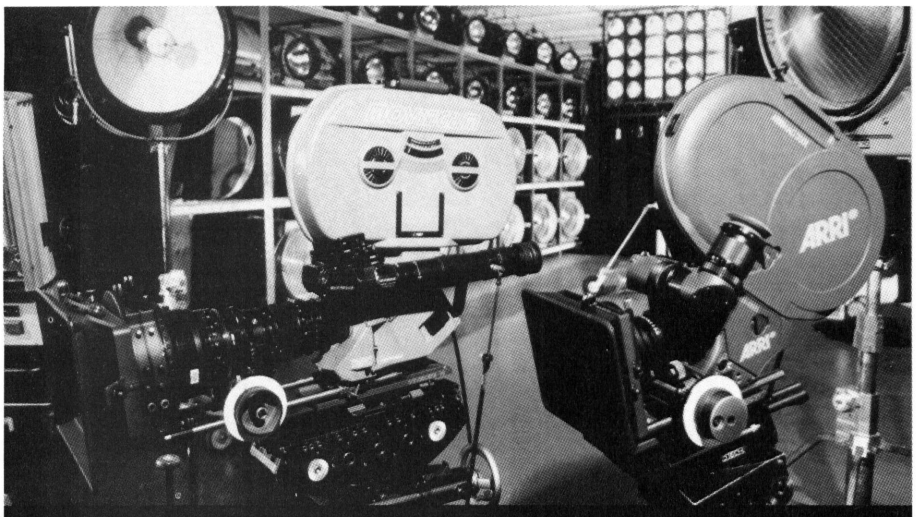

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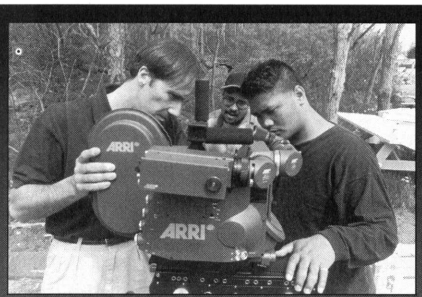

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Sony could begin to rebuild it and install the new HD equipment. From March 8 through April 18, *The Tonight Show* operated out of a temporary mobile truck; during the week of April 19, the show went dark to allow for rehearsal in the new facilities before the April 26 HDTV debut.

The first "island" built was an equipment center with tape machines and switcher electronics to support the HD edit facilities. Summey explains, "When that room came up, it allowed us to install the edit functions, so NBC's people could go out with the portable equipment and start producing and editing in HD without affecting the daily operations."

With the equipment room and edit "islands" complete, Sony Systems Integration turned its attention to completing the all-important control room, which included a somewhat unusual first step: constructing a full-sized foamcore mockup of the workspace. "We didn't have time for a lot of surprises," Summey says. "We only had a few weeks to rebuild the room, and it would be entirely new, not a copy of the old one. The sightlines, operational areas and technical director's position are all different, the equipment has changed, and everyone's relationship to the video wall has also changed. We had to make sure that everyone knew what would be there. To accomplish that, we built the foamcore mockup, which we do for about 20 percent of the systems we build. That way, all of the NBC personnel would know what their positions would feel like, and suggest changes if necessary."

The new HDTV control room and edit suite feature a three M/E Sony HDS-7000 switcher, an HDME-7000 multi-effects DVE system, HDS-V3232 HD SDI video routers, HDW-500 HDCAM VTRs, HDM-series monitors and the PFV-HD/HKPF/BKPF series of SDTV/HDTV conversion and distribution products. In addition to Sony HD equipment, the new HDTV facility also includes the Euphonix 3000 audio board. According to NBC vice president of entertainment production operations Jim Powell, *The Tonight*

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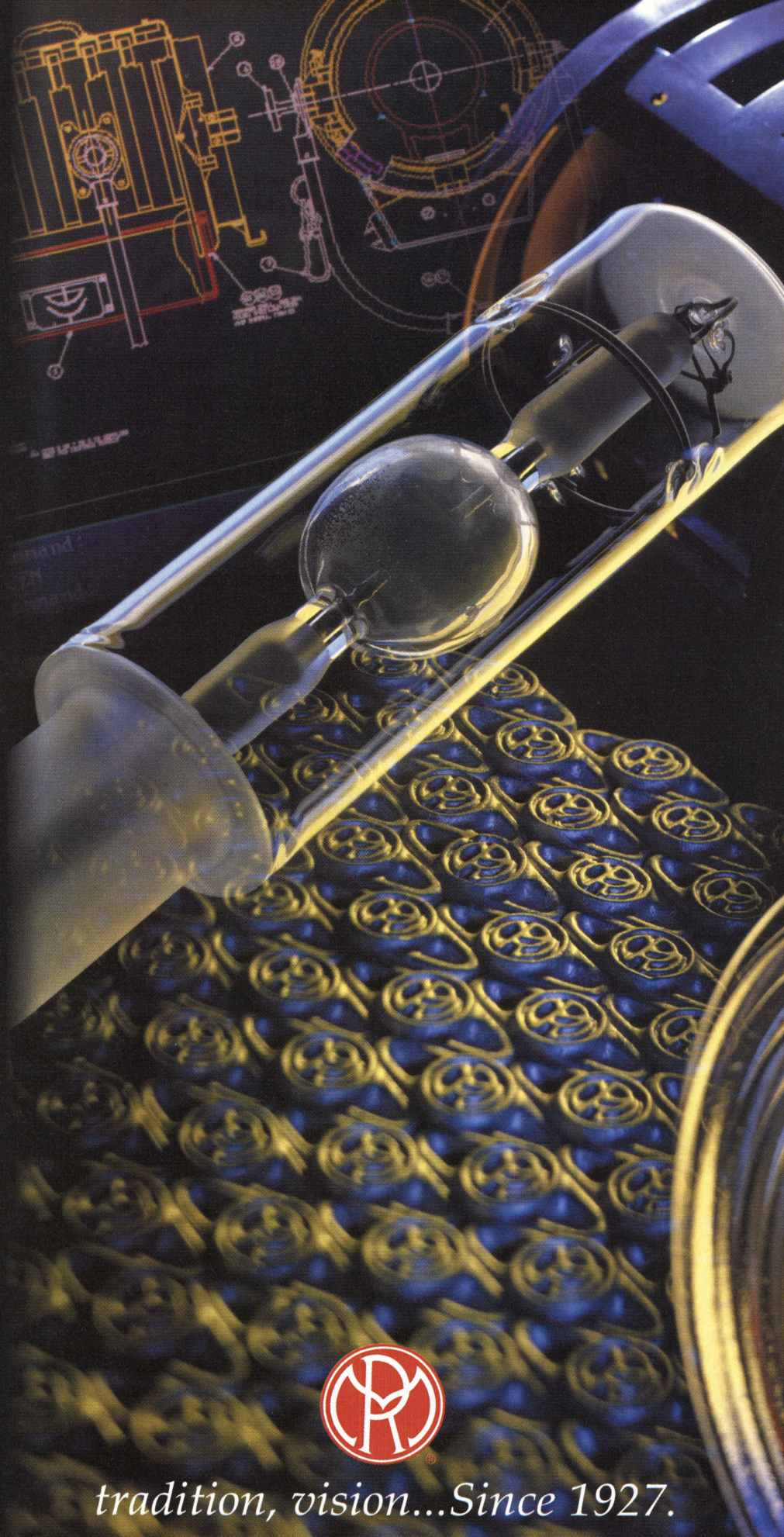

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Show will continue to broadcast in Dolby Surround for the forseeable future, "because of the capacity of stations out there."

The most significant control-room alteration has been in the area of graphics. NBC switched from their former use of an analog Video Toaster to Pinnacle Systems digital gear, adding the CCIR 601-based Lightning 1000 still store/image management system and FXDeko for character generation and image manipulation. Summey says that graphics accounts for "the largest single operating space" in the control room. "I was impressed with the graphics more than anything else," Summey admits. "Putting out cameras in the studio was one thing; it's not a big technical challenge to do parallel formats. The challenge that was created for the show's graphic artist group, headed by Mac McAlpin, was that he had two formats to work with — a wide and narrow screen. He's really challenged to take both formats into account."

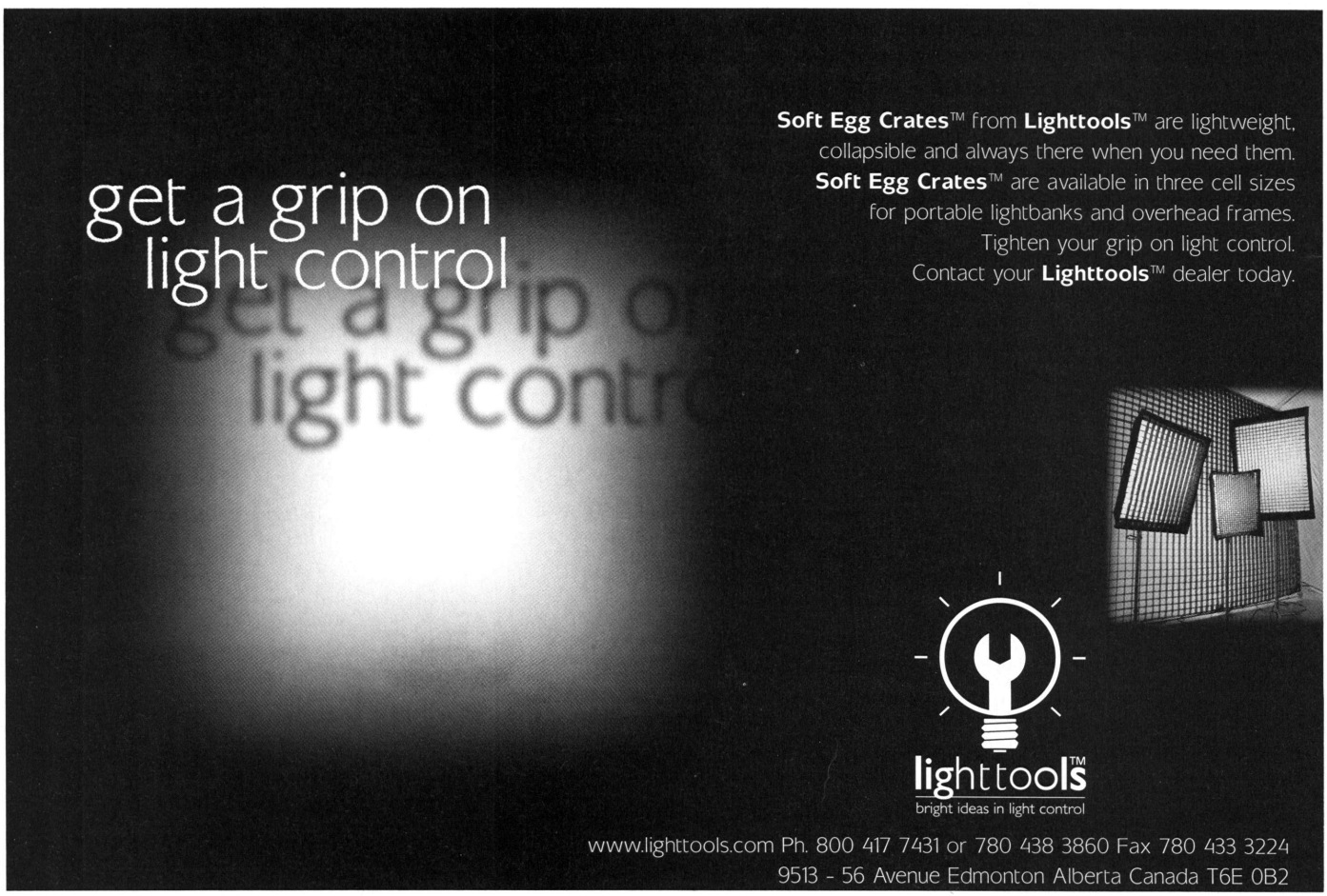
To highlight HDTV for the NTSC viewing audience, the talk show's graphics team will, for example, grab a widescreen shot, bring it down into a letterbox, and utilize it as a unique bumper shot.

After installation of the new HD facilities, rehearsals were staged during the show's scheduled dark time during the week prior to sweeps. Dhanendra Patel was one of the Sony camera specialists who helped train the program's camera operators to use the new HDTV cameras. "The biggest difference was for them to recognize the new aspect ratio and, at the same time, to protect for the 4:3 image," Patel says.

At the start of the training sessions, Patel set up the cameras to show both the 16:9 and 4:3 images, with markers for each frame in the viewfinder. In addition, modulation level control gave the 4:3 area a higher luminance level; it therefore became a brighter and more visual way of assuring that the action would constantly be centered. After three to four days of working with the cameras in this manner, the operators decided to leave the viewfinder in the 4:3 setting only. "The reason is that focusing is extremely critical in HD," Patel explains. "For the camera operator, focusing is not easy, because the viewfinders are not HD CRTs. They're still standard-resolution. Making the image 4:3 gives them an image that's bigger vertically so they can concentrate on focusing and not have to worry about the two different aspect ratios and different intensity levels."

Patel notes that HD's heightened resolution makes focusing a critical concern. "If the focusing is even a little off, you can see it. For Jay Leno, they used to focus on his lavaliere microphone. Now, they focus on his eyeballs, because that way the face and hair are much sharper. If you went for the microphone on his shoulder collar, then part of his hair could be out of focus if the camera is at an angle."

With the camera operators



focusing strictly on the 4:3 image, responsibility for the 16:9 image integrity falls to the control room's video operator, who relies upon two 28" HD monitors — one for previews and the other for program output. "Sometimes, the director will say, 'Camera 3, zoom out a little more to get the 16:9 integrity,'" says Patel. "But since he's looking at the 28" monitor, he can easily correct for any problems in framing for 16:9."

Sony further tweaked the system by placing an NTSC vectorscope in the center of the video operator's view — rather than an HD scope. "When you look at the vectorscope with HD, the hue of the image is very fuzzy, noisy and large, so it's almost impossible to 'paint' during the show," says Patel. "The cuts are pretty fast, so that's why the NBC video operator is still using an NTSC scope for hue. He can read the NTSC scopes more quickly."

Though a switch from NTSC to HD might seem like a huge shift in production, Patel says that these adjustments have been the only ones that the NBC staff has had to accommodate. "Apart from focusing and aspect ratio, it's pretty simple," attests Patel. "The camera features are the same, and the camera operators are extremely happy."

The 1999 CSC Awards

Celebrating its 42nd year, the Canadian Society of Cinematographers recently presented its annual awards in downtown Toronto. The award for Best Theatrical Feature went to Derek Rogers, CSC for his work on *Cube* (see Production Slate, *AC* March '98). Also nominated were Douglas Koch, CSC for *Last Night* (*AC*, March '99) and Michael Storey, CSC for *Summer of the Monkeys*.

Winners in the television category were Paul Sarossy, CSC for drama (MGM TV's *Rocky Marciano*) and Miroslaw Baszak for series (the "Malka" episode of *The Rescuers*). Other honorees included Dylan McLeod, CSC for music videos (Bootsy Collins's "Do the Freak"), Matthew R. Phillips for industrials (Acme Pictures' *The Wave*), Joan Hutton, CSC for documentary (*Hitman Hart: Wrestling With Shadows*), and Bill Parrell, CSC for dramatic short (*Blind Man's Bluff*). The Fritz Spiess Award for commercial cinematography went to André Pienaar, CSC (the CIBC spot "Literacy"). National network CTV reporter Bill Tash earned the Roy Tash Award for spot news ("Police Abuse"), while his colleague Wendell Tenove earned the Stan Clinton Award for news essay ("Weibo's War"). Colleen Norcross received the Camera Assistant Award of Merit, and the Student Cinematography prize went to Ryerson Polytechnic University's Christian Moreton (*Strange Fruit*).

The CSC also bestowed three special honors. Maria Topalovich, president of the Academy of Canadian Cinema and Television, earned the Bill Hilson Award for outstanding service in the development of Canada's motion

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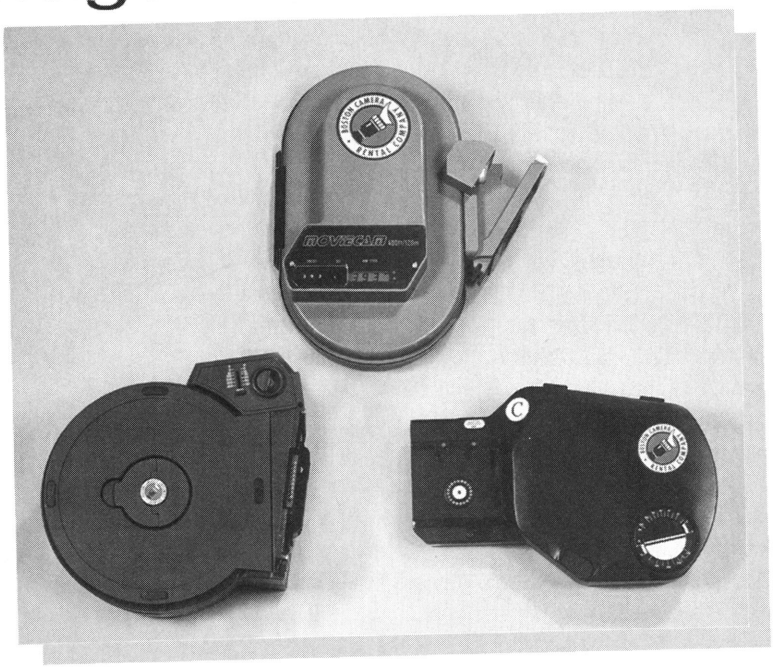

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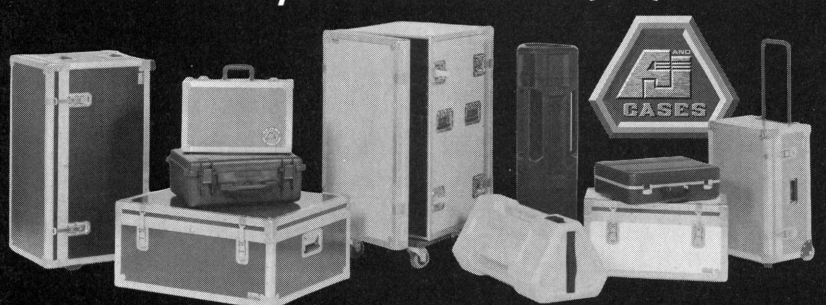

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picture industry. Robert Rouveroy, CSC claimed the Fuji Award in recognition of extraordinary contributions to the Society. Cinematographer Bert Dunk, ASC, CSC took home Kodak's New Century Award for his outstanding contributions to the art of cinematography. On behalf of the organization, CSC president Joan Hutton made a special presentation to Kodak Canada's president and CEO, Ed Jurus, to commemorate the company's 100th anniversary.

$100,000 Scholarships for NYU Film Students

New York University's Tisch School of the Arts recently received $100,000 student grants from both Eastman Kodak and Miramax Films.

Kodak's Worldwide Student Program donated its sponsorship to NYU's International Student Film Festival. This financial support will be administered over four years as a means of underwriting festival expenses and award product grants to winning student filmmakers. The Fourth NYU International Student Film Festival will take place in New York from October 4-9.

The Tisch School's Kanbar Institute of Film and Television organizes this biannual showcase for student films. More than 80 film schools around the globe are invited to submit their best student movies for screening. This competition alternates venues between New York City and Florence, Italy, and features cash awards, panel discussions and workshops conducted by industry professionals and special guest artists.

Kodak's Worldwide Student Program was established in 1991 to support future generations of moviemakers through a variety of educational initiatives: the Eastman Scholarship program, the Educational Allowance program, the Eastman Training Modules, a VIP Student News Service, the Kodak Images newsletter and the Eastman Product Grant program.

Miramax Films, meanwhile, is offering a scholarship aimed at undergraduate film students from New

York City. Designed for residents who have graduated from a high school in one of the city's five boroughs, the Miramax Scholarships will be administered over the course of four years. Applicants must also demonstrate filmmaking talent and financial need.

Miramax Films co-chairman Harvey Weinstein noted, "My brother Bob and I were born and raised in New York City, and we founded Miramax Films here 20 years ago. We are proud to help city students who are interested in film to realize their dreams. We're thrilled to establish the Miramax Scholarships at the most prestigious film school in the East."

Likely first applicants for Miramax Scholarships will come from the Tisch School's Future Filmmakers Program, a high school initiative devised to teach filmmaking skills to underrepresented minority students. For the past 11 years, 15 students have spent 10 Saturdays every spring semester learning how to make movies. Most students who complete the program apply to NYU, but a lack of financial aid prevents many from enrolling.

Presently, less than five percent of the Tisch School's undergraduates hail from New York City. Despite the dramatic increase in the school's application pool, this represents a decline over the past 15 years. The Miramax Scholarship program will provide a way to recruit and retain young artists from the Big Apple who otherwise would be unable to attend the Tisch School.

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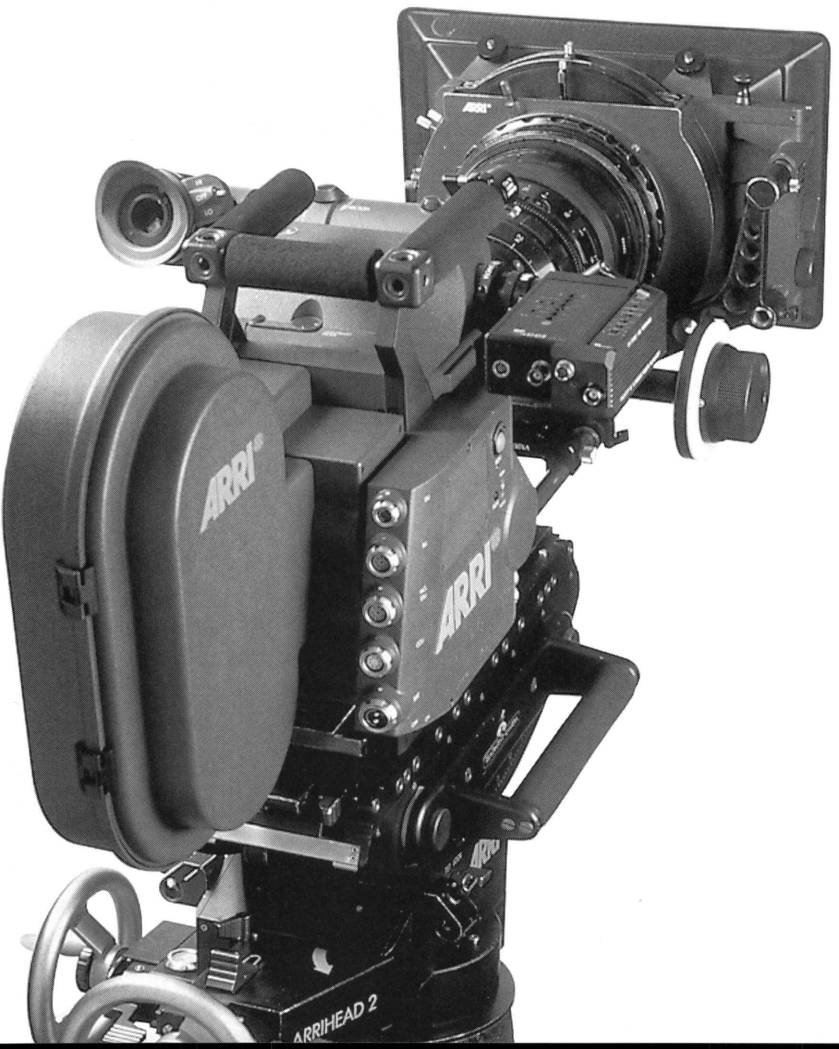
DP: ***Janusz Kaminski, ASC***



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Sci-Fi Cowboys

Director of photography Michael Ballhaus, ASC adds a glowing patina to the genre-blending spoof *Wild Wild West.*

by David E. Williams

Photography by Murray Close, Bruce W. Talamon and Mark Fellman

While photographing such subversive pictures as *Beware of a Holy Whore* and *Chinese Roulette* in the 1970s for iconoclastic German filmmaker Rainer Werner Fassbinder, did cinematographer Michael Ballhaus, ASC ever imagine himself shooting a comedic Hollywood adventure as immense and complex as *Wild Wild West?* With characteristic good humor and a gentle laugh, the cameraman replies, "No, I certainly never did."

Ballhaus's impressive career certainly demonstrates his affinity for diverse material, however. His extensive credits include *Air Force One, Sleepers* (see *AC* Oct. '96), *Outbreak, Quiz Show, The Age of Innocence* (*AC* Oct. '93), *Bram Stoker's Dracula* (*AC* Nov. '92), *GoodFellas, The Fabulous Baker Boys* (*AC* May '90), *The Last Temptation of Christ, The Glass Menagerie* (*AC* Nov. '87), *The Color of Money* (*AC* Nov. '86), *After Hours, Reckless, Landscape With Waitress* (*AC* Oct. '85), *Lili Marleen, The Marriage of Maria Braun, Satan's Brew* and *Fox and His Friends.*

A visual effects-laden fantasy, the cinematographer's latest feature is based on the sly, two-fisted CBS series *The Wild, Wild West* (1965-69), which featured Robert Conrad as the charming-yet-macho James T. West, and Ross Martin as his gadget-loving sidekick, Artemus Gordon. Both characters were special Federal agents charged by President Ulysses S. Grant to protect U.S. interests from an array of villains attempting to plunder the 1870s-era Frontier. The show's heroes and villains were equipped with an arsenal of Victorian-Gothic weaponry that recalled the visions of H.G. Wells and Jules Verne, including steam-powered robots, customized rail cars and clockwork atom bombs. West and Gordon's heroics enthralled audiences, and the characters were revived for several telefilms before director Barry Sonnenfeld selected *Wild Wild West* to be his followup to

Photos courtesy of Warner Bros.

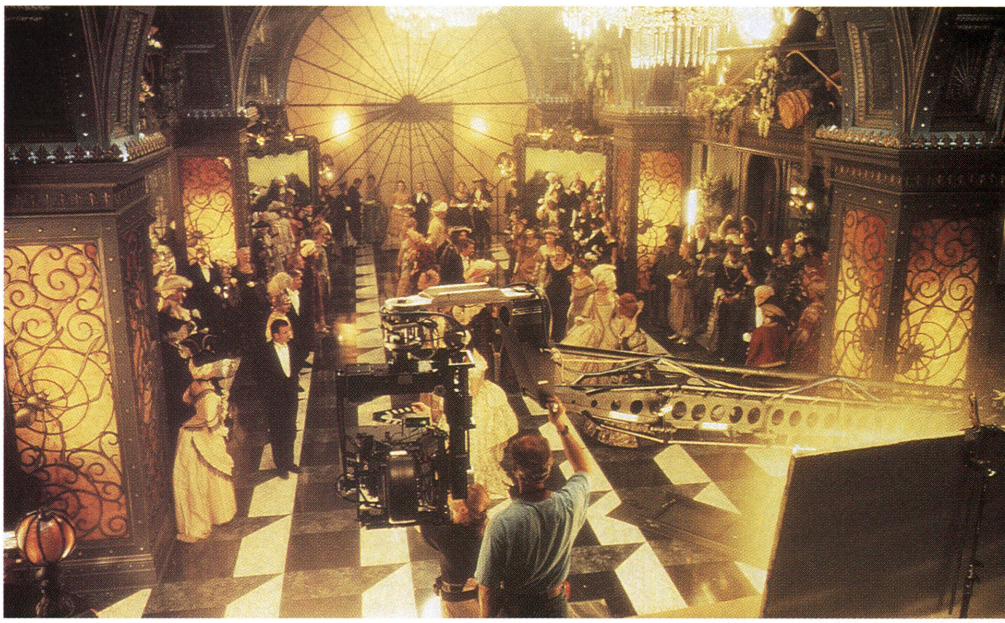
Men in Black (see coverage in *AC* June and Dec. '97).

In this new film, the diabolical Dr. Arliss Loveless (Kenneth Branagh) threatens the Old West with an oversized mechanical arachnid dubbed the Tarantula. President Grant (played by original-series star Conrad) turns to West (Will Smith) and Gordon (Kevin Kline) in the hope of thwarting the evildoer. As the TV show did, the film features both outlandishly whimsical production design — courtesy of Bo Welch (*Men in Black, Edward Scissorhands, Wolf*) — and a bevy of temptresses who assist the villain.

Ballhaus was one of the first people approached to join the *Wild Wild West* project, which he proudly notes is the 25th feature that he has photographed since moving to the U.S. from Germany in 1983. "In February of 1998, when Barry [Sonnenfeld] asked me to shoot the film, I was already committed to shooting a Dean Martin biography — *Dino* — for Martin Scorsese," Ballhaus recounts. "When *Dino* got canceled, Barry immediately called me again. This was still 10 weeks before principal shooting was to begin, so I decided to do it."

Ballhaus notes that he and Sonnenfeld had previously collaborated on *GoodFellas* in 1989. "We didn't actually work together," the cameraman elaborates, "but because we had gone so far over schedule on that film, I had to leave to start shooting *Postcards From the Edge* for Mike Nichols. Barry took over for me on the last few days of principal photography. That was the first time we'd met, and I really liked his work; he was a great cinematographer. After Barry left cinematography to begin directing, he always said, 'One day we will shoot together.'"

The humor and camaraderie in the *Wild Wild West* script by Jeffrey Price and Peter Seaman appealed to Ballhaus, but "because of the special effects and CGI work, I knew it would also be a big challenge to do a movie of this size. I had experience in doing bluescreen/greenscreen and motion-control work on *Air Force One* and *Outbreak*, but not to this extent, so the technical aspect of the production was fascinating to me."



Ballhaus found that his prep period for *West*'s 128-day shoot was largely a lesson in logistics. He submits, "Eighty percent of my work on this picture was 'normal procedure' in terms of camera and lighting. But it was on a much bigger scale, so there were a lot of meetings about the lighting, especially in regard to our practical sources. They had to be planned well in advance in order for the production design and props to be in place so we could do our work.

"Fortunately, I had a great crew. This was my thirteenth film with my gaffer, Jim Tynes. My key grip was Patrick Daily, and the rigging gaffer was Mike McGuire. We're like family. We don't have to talk a lot; we can just look at a set and get to work." Rounding out the crew were camera operator Daniel C. Gold and first assistant Johnny Walker.

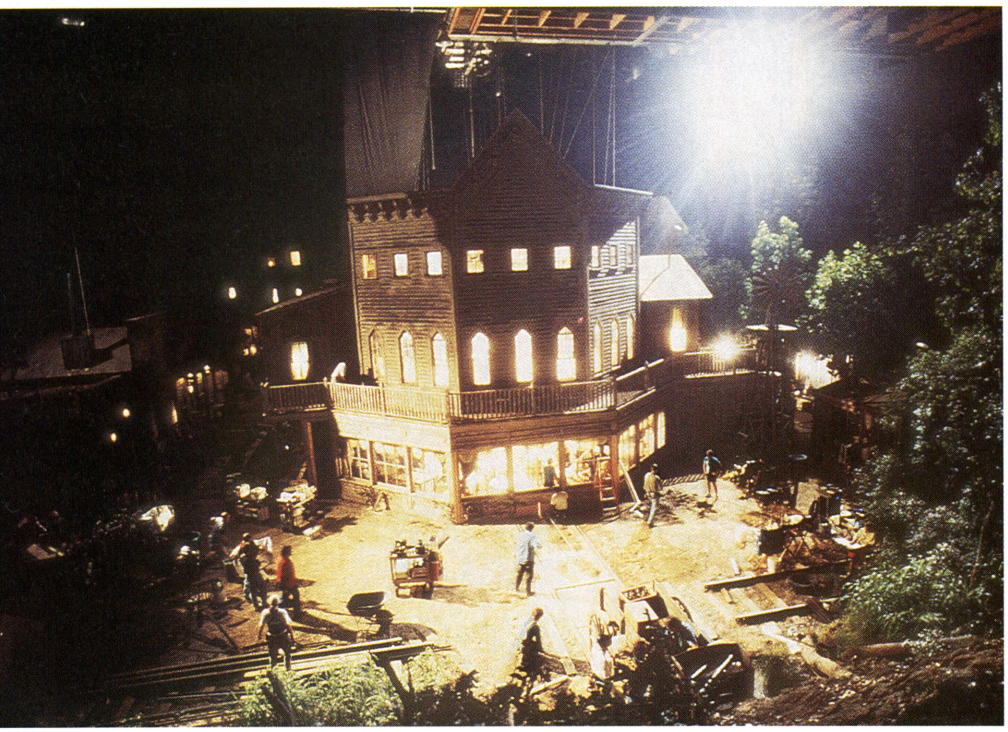
Framing the Range

Early on, Ballhaus and Sonnenfeld made a series of decisions about the picture's photographic style. Their ideas were suggested by both the film's blending of genres and the filmmakers' individual preferences. "When you think 'Western,' you immediately think 'widescreen,'" Ballhaus offers, "but this film really isn't a Western. We don't have those panoramic landscape shots that would be best served by widescreen. Instead, it's more of a period comedy that's funny partially because of the science-fiction aspects of the story — these amazing devices. It's almost a futuristic period film, which is an interesting combination.

"Barry and I discussed the aspect ratio and film format for quite a while," Ballhaus continues. "At first, I wanted to shoot in widescreen Super 35. After some tests, though, I felt Barry would be more comfortable working in spherical 1.85:1, for two reasons. First, I believe he feels that comedy works better in 1.85, which I think is right. Second, Barry

Opposite: Heroic special agent James T. West (Will Smith) confronts his nemesis, Dr. Arliss Loveless (Kenneth Branagh), in the evildoer's mansion. This page: The impressive ballroom set, shown above, offered extensive practical sources, including eight internally lit columns. Cinematographer Michael Ballhaus, ASC (at left, in foreground with director Barry Sonnenfeld) stayed true to the period's available sources, utilizing warm, flickering firelight effects throughout the picture.

Sci-Fi Cowboys



Fat Can Candy's Saloon was built as a practical set on stage at Sony Studios. This elaborate setup allowed the action to travel in and out of the structure, and also cut down on night exterior work that would have otherwise been required if the interior and exterior of the saloon had been constructed on two separate sites.

never shot a film himself in 2.35:1. As a cinematographer, he had a very specific and precise style of shooting, and now, as a director, he also has a particular style.

"For example, his sense of framing is very different from what I would normally do. He likes to have the action or subject in the center most of the time, which doesn't work well in 2.35. In widescreen, you have to fill the whole frame. It doesn't make sense to have a close-up in the center of the frame and have nothing to the right or left.

"Also, Barry loves wide-angle lenses, and I had never before used wide lenses to the extent that I did on this picture. Doing a close-up with an 18mm lens was something new for me, but it worked and was more dynamic. I liked that, but it was an adjustment I had to make.

"That type of style wouldn't be correct for every movie, but it was in this case because it *feels* different. In a close-up with an 18mm lens, even if the actor moves just a few inches, the effect is very different than if you're using a 50mm lens. There is a magnification to the change.

"It's funny, the film is in 1.85:1, but it feels wider than that because of the use of wide lenses. You can see a lot more, and not only in terms of depth. For instance, if you have a close-up, you see a lot more of the background than you usually would. In this film, there are several scenes set in train cars. If we were on a 50mm doing our close-ups, the audience wouldn't see much of the car. With the 18mm, they can, which adds to the apparent scope of the film."

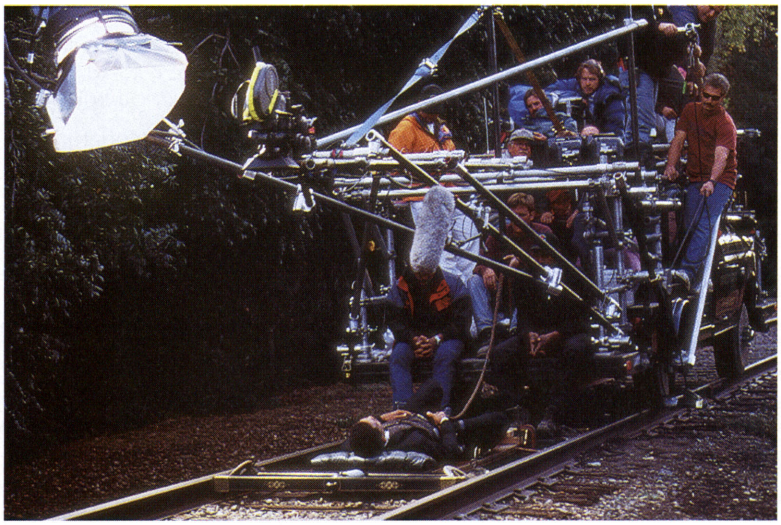
Shooting with his preferred Arriflex cameras — both 435s and 535Bs — Ballhaus relied heavily on the three Zeiss/Arri Variable Prime lenses throughout the shoot, particularly the 16-30mm VP1 unit. "We used them on almost every shot," he reports. "You can work very quickly with them because if you want to go a little wider or tighter, you can just adjust them. Also, the Variable Primes are as good as standard lenses, if not better."

Giddyap!

Wild Wild West began shooting in late April of 1998. Following stage work at Sony Studios in Culver City and night exteriors at the Disney Ranch outside of Los Angeles, the production spent several weeks doing day exteriors in Santa Fe, New Mexico, before finishing up at Warner Bros. in Burbank. Ballhaus recalls, "During the last segment of the shoot, the effects work was very complex, so we were only doing three or four shots a day."

The film's second unit — including cinematographer David M. Dunlap — also traveled to Pierce, Idaho to shoot the film's opening sequences. Fresh off *The Matrix*, cameraman Bill Pope added his expertise as well.

Bo Welch's sets, including Loveless's bordello-style bedroom, the grimy interiors of the Tarantula walking machine, the interior and exterior of Fat Can Candy's Saloon, and James West's railroad car, reflect the film's genre-blending tone, and were alternately fashioned with complex patterns, deep shadows, rich



To capture a shot of a terrified West "riding the rails" on a small cart, key grip Patrick Daily and his team constructed an arm-like support for Ballhaus's Arriflex camera and a directional softlight for fill, extending the rig from a modified truck.

colors and dark-wood textures. To create separation between the actors and their surroundings, Ballhaus kept the backgrounds "light, but not so prominent that they might distract the viewer's eye from the actors and the action. Many of our scenes are set at night, and we kept those backgrounds dark; while you can see detail, it's not jumping out at you. However, the sets sometimes really soaked up the light — inside West's train car, for example, which had a lot of dark wood and dark green curtains — so we had to add much more light than is apparent. We generally staged scenes so they were sidelit, which added separation, and added backlight when possible."

However, gaffer Jim Tynes stresses that side and backlight options were severely limited due to Sonnenfeld's penchant for wide-angle lenses. "That forced us to come around toward the camera, but that kind of lighting is right for comedy," says Tynes, who began his working relationship with Ballhaus on the 1988 film *Baja Oklahoma* after making a lasting impression during a cold-call interview.

Ballhaus's overall lighting approach traditionally reflected both *West*'s period setting and the Western genre, as fire effects motivated most of the illumination. "One thing I love about period movies is that the lighting — candles, gaslight or fires — is in constant motion," the cameraman explains, recalling his work on *The Age of Innocence* and *Bram Stoker's Dracula*. "That type of illumination gives the image a much more emotional feeling than if the light is fixed."

As he had done on *Men in Black*, Bo Welch worked to integrate practical lighting into *West*'s elaborate sets. "Bo is one of the best production designers I've worked with," attests Ballhaus, who had recently collaborated with Welch on the satire *Primary Colors*. "His sets were fantastic. For the grand ballroom of Dr. Loveless's mansion, Bo designed eight of these amazing, internally lit translucent columns and a huge fireplace. Those sources gave us a starting point from which to work."

Tynes and his crew built the electrical fixtures, while Welch's department constructed the shells from plastics resembling stained glass and featuring a spiderweb motif. "Bo wanted the column lights to be fairly warm, so the plastics were rather orange, which I liked," Ballhaus details. "Barry wanted them to be a bit cooler, though, so we gelled the fluorescent tubes inside with ½ CTB."

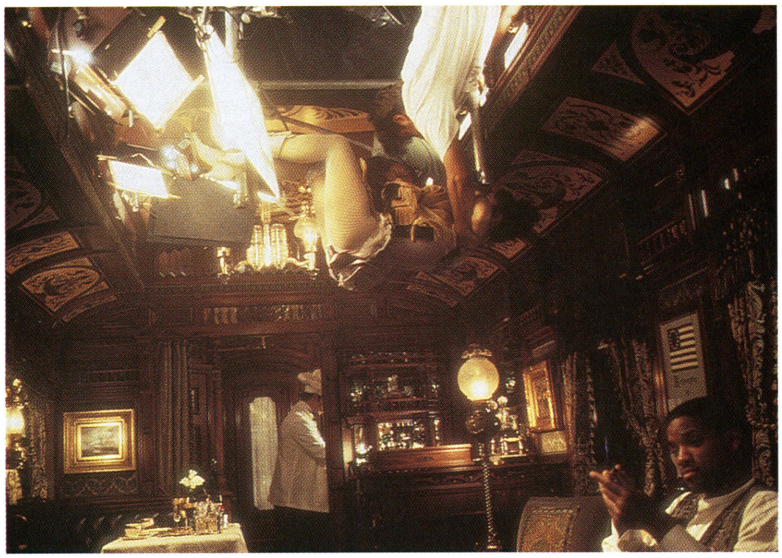
The resulting light from the columns was in the 1500°K to 1800°K range, but after it mixed with the cooler ambiance from above, "any light hitting the actors was closer to 2300°K," Tynes says. "The base light was pretty liberal since this was a comedy, and we always had a lot of it coming in from the top. However, the toplight was always directional, so it never had that flat, 'lit by fluorescents' look."

The gaffer adds, "The columns were a big scenic element, and we used them to motivate light whenever we could. Like the TV series did, *Wild Wild West* features a lot of things that could not have existed in the given time period. You can find fluorescent-lit columns like these in any modern hotel or mansion, but back in the day, they would have had to use gaslight. To give the columns a subtle flickering effect, our dimmerboard operator, Cricket Sloat, designed a series of random chases for the entire setup."

Barroom Blast

Fat Can Candy's Saloon, where West and Gordon encounter the alluring Rita Escobar (Salma Hayek), was constructed on Stage 27 at Sony Studios as a practical structure. This allowed the filmmakers to shoot both interiors and exteriors on a single site, and to block the action realistically, since characters could move freely in and out of the three-

Sci-Fi Cowboys



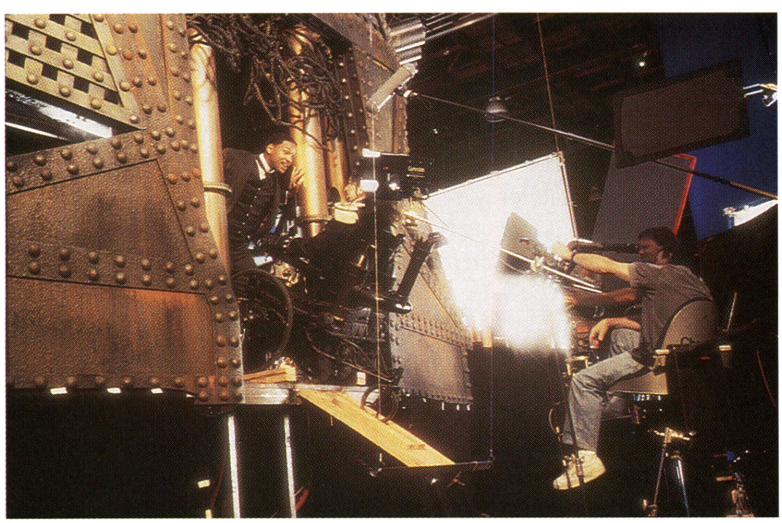
Right: West's rail car, the Wanderer, was constructed with dark mahogany woodwork, and required more light than is apparent onscreen. Lighting was facilitated by an overhead bay. Here, Will Smith stands by for a take as actress Salma Hayek is positioned to drop into the seat next to him. Below: West grapples with the wheelchair-bound Loveless while aboard the villain's giant walking machine, the Tarantula. Sets depicting interior and exterior portions of the mechanized beast were constructed at Warner Bros., while Industrial Light & Magic rendered the machine in its entirety.

story-tall watering hole. "There was too much interaction between the inside and the outside of the saloon to have the interior and exterior separated," Ballhaus says. "Also, the scenes that occur there are all set at night, which would have required us to shoot many more night exteriors, which are more difficult to control. For these reasons, it was much easier to build the entire structure on stage.

"I normally try to keep my night exteriors on the cool side, but Barry didn't like that too much," Ballhaus notes. "He prefers the color temperatures to be more even, and he generally doesn't like colored light. There was only perhaps 500°K difference between the interior and exterior [of the saloon], while I would usually have about 1500°K of difference between them. But it worked just fine."

To give the impression that the saloon interior was primarily lit by a central chandelier, a cluster of 4' Chinese lanterns was hung in the center of the main room. Further diffused with light grid cloth, the spherical fixtures' individual 10K bulbs offered plenty of soft illumination, which was warmed with judicious dimming.

Taking a Western cliché to an extreme for a humorous effect, the prop chandelier was designed as 7' x 6' array of deer antlers festooned with lights. "That thing was so huge that it actually blocked the light it was motivating," Tynes says, "so we'd have to lift it up out of the way whenever it wasn't in the shot; otherwise, we'd somehow cheat light around it. We didn't wire the chandelier with too many lights, because it wasn't affecting the backgrounds.



"We had over 300 practicals on that set, and because Michael was shooting with stocks rated at 200 ASA, they would burn out if we let them play naturally. To correct that, we'd dim the practicals down to where they looked pleasing to the eye and then add a 100- or 250-watt gag light on a dimmer behind them. It was a fairly dimmer-intensive show.

"Early on, we got together with our set decorator, Cheryl Carasik. She's brilliant, and her choices of practicals were really beautiful, eclectic, and accurate to the period. However, when you have so many practicals, you start to get diminishing returns because of the amount of work it takes to wire them all and then *hide* those wires. It gets to be a very elaborate process, and you can simply run out of time."

Additional lighting for both the saloon interior and exterior was done from large scaffolding trusses riding on traveling tracks built outside the set. Designed by key grip Patrick Daily and rigger Mike McGuire, the trusses could be raised and lowered by chain motors, allowing them to move in close to the action or pull back for wide-angle shots. "Another truss lowered through the center of the saloon, so we had a platform to light from when we were on the ground floor," Tynes says. "We mostly used 5Ks coming through Chimeras for a directional softlight, and then Leikos for the dance number that takes place on the stage. That setup gave us the opportunity to create a lot of different looks in there."

West and Gordon narrowly escape death when Fat Can's joint detonates in grandiose gouts of flame

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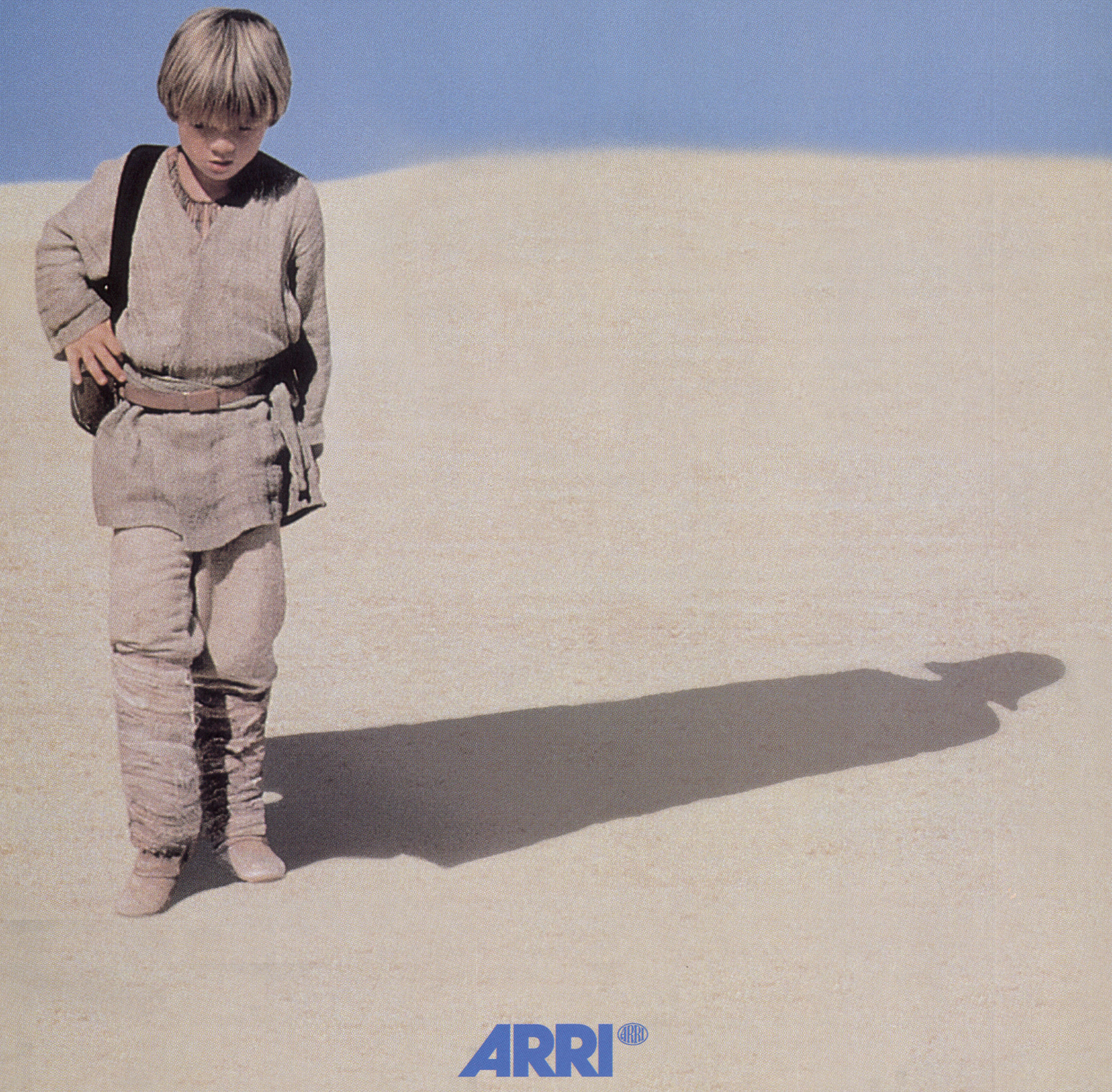

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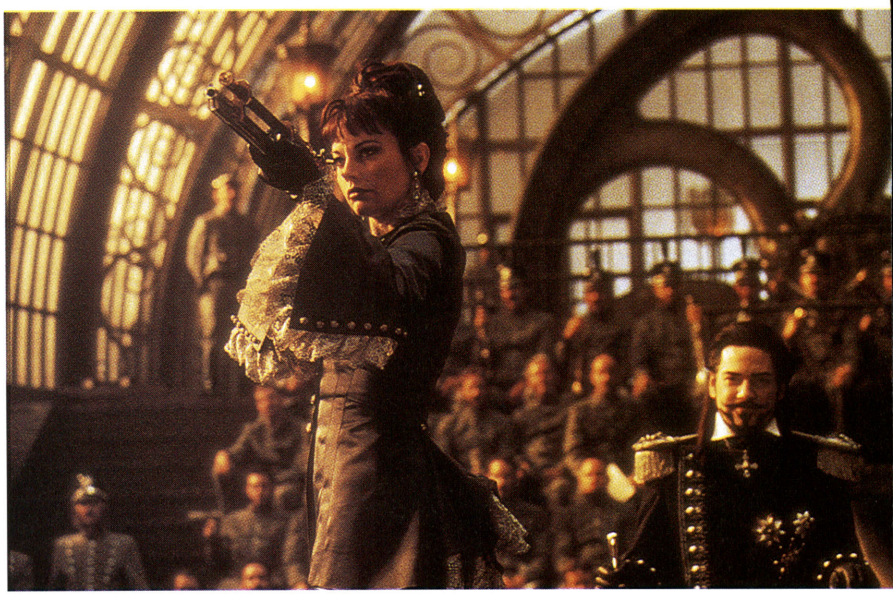

Loveless's greenhouse hideaway, constructed on Stage 16 at Warner Bros., was the film's largest set. The translucent walls were made of Plexiglas, which was then painted with a wash to simulate frosted glass. Behind the set was a 360-degree cyclorama depicting a desert landscape. Ballhaus estimates that some 1.4 million watts of light were used for the greenhouse scenes.

— a true feat of filmmaking expertise, considering that the structure was enclosed on a stage. Ballhaus's basic stop of T2.8 to T4 ensured that the pyrotechnics would be rendered on film as orange blossoms instead of burning out white. "That worked fine," the cameraman says, "but the effects people also kept the explosions down a bit and under control because of our situation. In a contemporary film, explosions are usually created with a lot of gasoline, but we certainly couldn't do that inside a stage."

West's Wild Ride

The Wanderer, James West's plush rail-car headquarters — ostensibly outfitted by Artemus Gordon with all manner of scientific devices, weapons and secret compartments — was constructed with flyaway walls and a removable ceiling to allow complete access for the filmmakers' cameras. However, Ballhaus generally dislikes working outside a set's proscribed parameters. "Once you put the camera outside the room, you change the feeling of the scene," the cinematographer elaborates, noting that this artificiality could undermine his generally naturalistic photographic approach. "We did fly a few walls when absolutely necessary due to space restrictions, but not often."

A variety of methods were used to create the sense that the Wanderer was indeed in transit, including moving lights, poor man's process and bluescreen work. "When a train is moving, the light coming through the windows is constantly changing," Ballhaus says, "so Patrick Daily devised a set of tracks that ran on both sides of the rail-car set. He and fabricator Chaz Norcross then built little cars mounted with cucurlorises that could fly by the lights to simulate motion. If sound was a problem — these cars did make some noise — Pat instead used a system of rotating flags or flags held by hand to create moving shadows."

The task of lighting the Wanderer's interior was hampered by both the cramped working conditions and the set's small side windows. "Fortunately, most of the film takes place late in the day — apparently a very long day!" Ballhaus says with a laugh. "This allowed us to make the best use possible of the car's windows. For the key light, we would use Dinos outside with ½ CTO, while our fill light then came from the ceiling of the car, or from some big bounces."

Tynes expands, "There was a lot of lighting crammed into that very small space. In addition, the original plan for lighting through the lower windows didn't carry the light to the top of the set the way we needed it to, so we added some overhead skylights to the train. During an overnight rigging session, we then added cyc strips down the entire length of the car to add ambiance from the top of the train. Those provided our base light. The skylights were very small — it wasn't an open ceiling — but by pounding them with the cyc strips we could bring out a lot of that dark wood interior."

The detailed Wanderer set had obviously been built with *West* sequels in mind, because it was constructed with mahogany and expensive brass fixtures. Attention had to be given to the set's metal finishes, since they could potentially reflect the bluescreens set up outside the windows, but dulling spray in shades of black and gray quickly remedied any problems.

Desert Hideaway

Built on the high-ceilinged Stage 16 at Warner Bros., Loveless's secret lair is a cavernous, greenhouse-like structure hidden in a deep desert canyon. Recalling the MIB headquarters that Bo Welch designed for *Men in Black*, it features translucent walls that allowed plenty of possibilities for illumination. "That was our biggest set," Ballhaus says, "and we ended up rigging 1.4 million watts of light in it, including 144 space lights hung from the ceiling. We hung a huge silk below the space lights to create a very soft ambiance. Again, the scenes in there were set late in the day, so the sun was supposed to be just peeking over the rim of the canyon, with its rays coming through the glass. To create that effect, we used eight Dinos gelled with ½ CTO for that late-day warmth. Those served to produce our key light. The color difference between the Dinos and the space lights was about 800°K, and that worked quite well."

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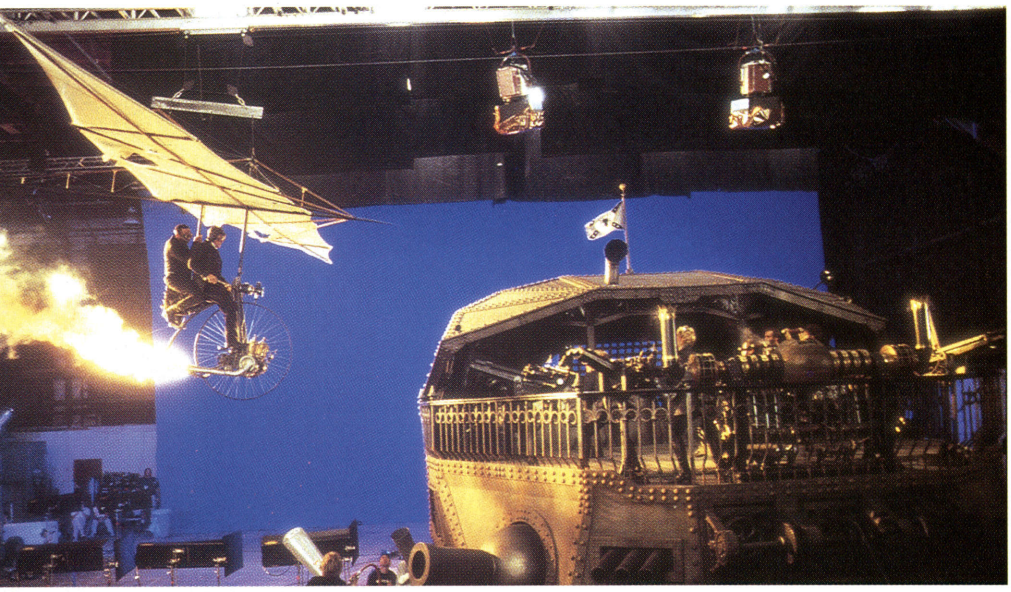

Above: West and his ingenious sidekick, Artemus Gordon, board the Tarantula via Gordon's rocket-powered glider, the Wasp. The elaborate stuntwork required to achieve this action was done at Warner Bros., where Ballhaus and his crew spent six weeks working on the film's visual-effects sequences. The bridge section of the Tarantula (below, right) was alternately photographed with bluescreen or sky backings, depending on whether the body of the vehicle would be seen in the shot — and therefore require CGI work by ILM's digital artists.

Despite the size of the set, "using our wide-angle lenses made it quite difficult to bring in the Dinos," Ballhaus says. "With a 14mm lens, you can see everything! Our toplight rigging was not a problem, but the sidelight was sometimes difficult."

The curved greenhouse-style walls were made of Plexiglas painted by the set dressers with a wash to resemble frosted glass. Beyond that was a 360-degree desert-landscape cyclorama. "We used 10 Moleenos and lots and lots of 20Ks in there," Tynes says. "The frosted glass helped, because doing our sun effect with Dinos could have resulted in a multiple shadows; the diffusion blended the light together to make it seem as if it was coming from one large source."

Effects Roundup

Making a final bid to rule the Old West, Loveless utilizes his walking Tarantula assault vehicle to destroy the frontier town of Silverado. West and Gordon attempt to thwart Loveless's plans by boarding the Tarantula via Gordon's rocket-powered glider, the Wasp.

While both contraptions were primarily rendered as CG models by Industrial Light & Magic (see story on page 48), these mechanical marvels were also built full-scale in whole or part and filmed on the Warner Bros. stages. The wonders visible onscreen include the Tarantula's open-air bridge, from which Loveless and his cohorts operate the multi-limbed device, and a complete version of the Wasp. Extensive bluescreen and poor man's process work was used to achieve the required shots, all of which were carefully storyboarded or rendered as video animatics when precise timing was necessary.

"Our effects supervisor was Eric Brevig, who is excellent," Ballhaus attests. "He and Barry had worked together on *Men in Black*, so Eric knew that Barry's goal was to achieve technical perfection. This meant that we wanted to give ILM material that would not require a lot of manipulation in order for it to work. If, for instance, a bluescreen element is shot incorrectly, it takes a lot of extra work later to correct it in post. As a result, the visual effects department had much more influence over the process of shooting than I had experienced on *Outbreak* or even *Air Force One*."

ILM's technical requirements had a direct impact on Ballhaus's choice of film stocks. He explains, "I like Kodak's Vision 320T, which I used quite a bit in the film and exposed at 200 ASA, but for the bluescreen work, ILM asked me to use 5248, which has less grain and a better blue layer. I rated it normally at 100 ASA, and because it's more contrasty, I had to use a bit more fill. I also used some 5293, because its blue layer is also better than in the 320T, and I sometimes needed a stock faster than 48. I rated the 93 normally at 200 ASA. However, since all of the effects shots were to be digitized and manipulated, ILM said they would work it out so the contrast in those shots would match the footage shot on the 320T, and they have done a pretty good job with that.

"I like the 320T because it has

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BY SUE MASTERMAN

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Making news

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Arrow 50

"The Arrow 50 retained the subtlety of control on the drag settings and kept functioning smoothly in the worst conditions".

Cinematographer Rory McGuinness made news recently when he was stranded for six weeks on an island in the remote Siberian arctic. While awaiting rescuers, Rory kept shooting the polar bear documentary in conditions that made incredible demands on crew and equipment.

"We had minus 25 to 30 Celsius, plus windchill, but while we had filmstock and bears we just kept shooting. It soon sorted out the gear. Some of it froze solid, while other things just kept going. The Arrow 50 retained the subtlety of control on the drag settings and kept functioning smoothly in the worst conditions".

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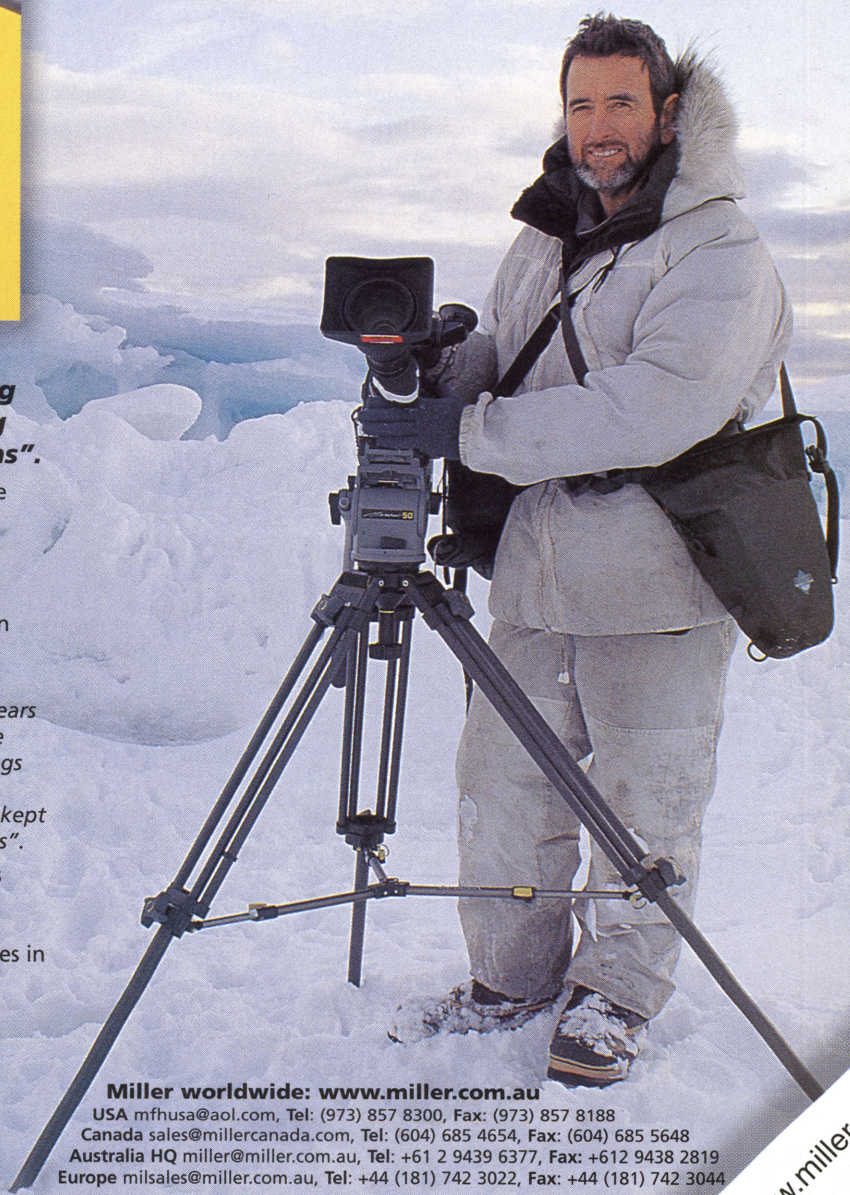

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a wide range of exposure, about 6 or 8 stops, and it's almost impossible to overexpose it, which is great. Also, you can play with it; the more you expose, the more contrast you get. If you read it at 320 ASA, it's very flat, but at 200 ASA it has good contrast. At 125 ASA, it has even more."

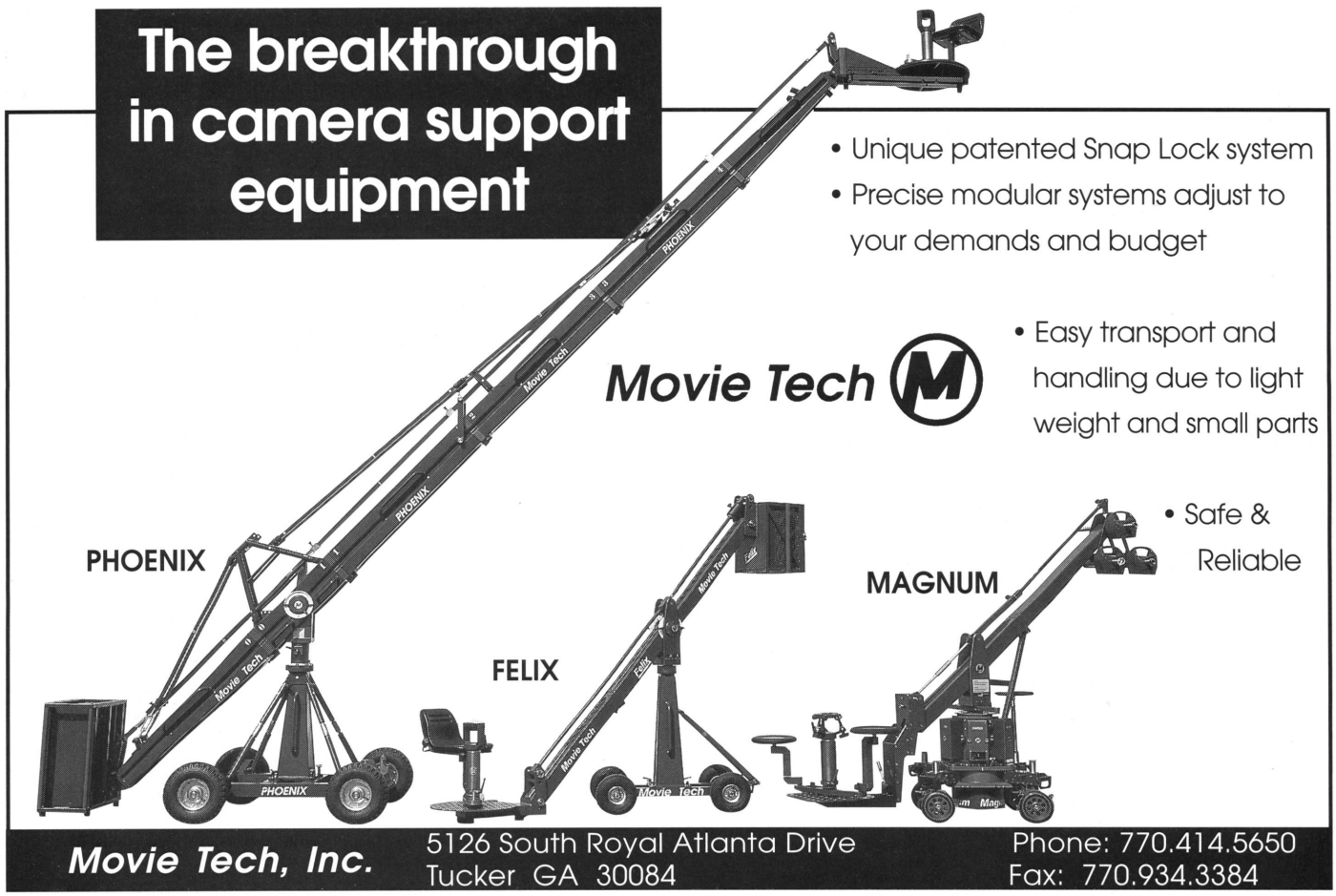
Asked if the higher built-in contrast of Kodak's Vision print stocks influenced his photographic approach, Ballhaus advises, "It all depends on how you expose things. If I were shooting the whole film with 48 and 93, it could be too contrasty if I did not properly expose and add more fill than I would ordinarily use." The cameraman additionally notes that Technicolor handled all of his dailies processing.

"ILM was very meticulous about the bluescreen shots," Ballhaus adds, "which meant they would very precisely measure the brightness of every square foot of the screens. They generally kept the bluescreens about a half-stop under the stop we were shooting at. That was good, because it left the foreground elements unaffected by any spill light coming from the screens. That's usually a problem because it can soften the edges of the subject, making it harder to create a good matte." ILM also wanted the bluescreens lit with blue fluorescents, prompting Tynes to use both Kino Flos and Mole Flos.

During the creation of shots involving the Wasp, the full-scale prop was usually mounted on a hydraulic motion base. "Shooting Will Smith and Kevin Kline flying on the Wasp was tough for a couple of reasons," Ballhaus explains. "The glider was always moving, so we had to keep our lights moving as well. The camera was on one crane, and a Dino on another. It wasn't easy to choreograph the cranes in order to prevent the wings of the Wasp from casting shadows on the actors."

Much of the visual effects photography was done with ILM's VistaVision units, fitted with Zeiss lenses. Asked if he was worried about any color or contrast discrepancies that might be apparent between this footage and that shot with his Variable Primes, Ballhaus replies, "Not really, because all lenses are quite good nowadays. I prefer Zeiss lenses, but Panavision's Primos and the new Cookes are also good. The differences begin to stand out when you are shooting wide-open, but if you're at a T4, as we were most of the time, the differences are not so evident."

Motion control was used extensively throughout the film, primarily on the many scenes involving Loveless, a double amputee who scurries about in a steam-powered wheelchair. "Whenever we were wide enough to see below his waist, we'd bring in the motion-control rig,"



Ballhaus says. "Those shots required at least two takes: one for the performance by Kenneth Branagh, and then a clean pass for the background so that ILM could remove his legs, which could otherwise be seen beneath the wheelchair.

"One of the most complicated of those shots shows Loveless sprouting mechanical legs — like those on the Tarantula — after his wheelchair gets jammed," Ballhaus recounts. "We had animatics to guide us through that scene, because the timing of the action was difficult." With full-scale mock-ups of the legs in place next to Branagh, Ballhaus also shot reference footage to show ILM's animators how his lighting would play on the metallic limbs; the effects artists would later have to attach CG versions of the articulated appendages to Loveless's torso, and carefully match the cameraman's illumination.

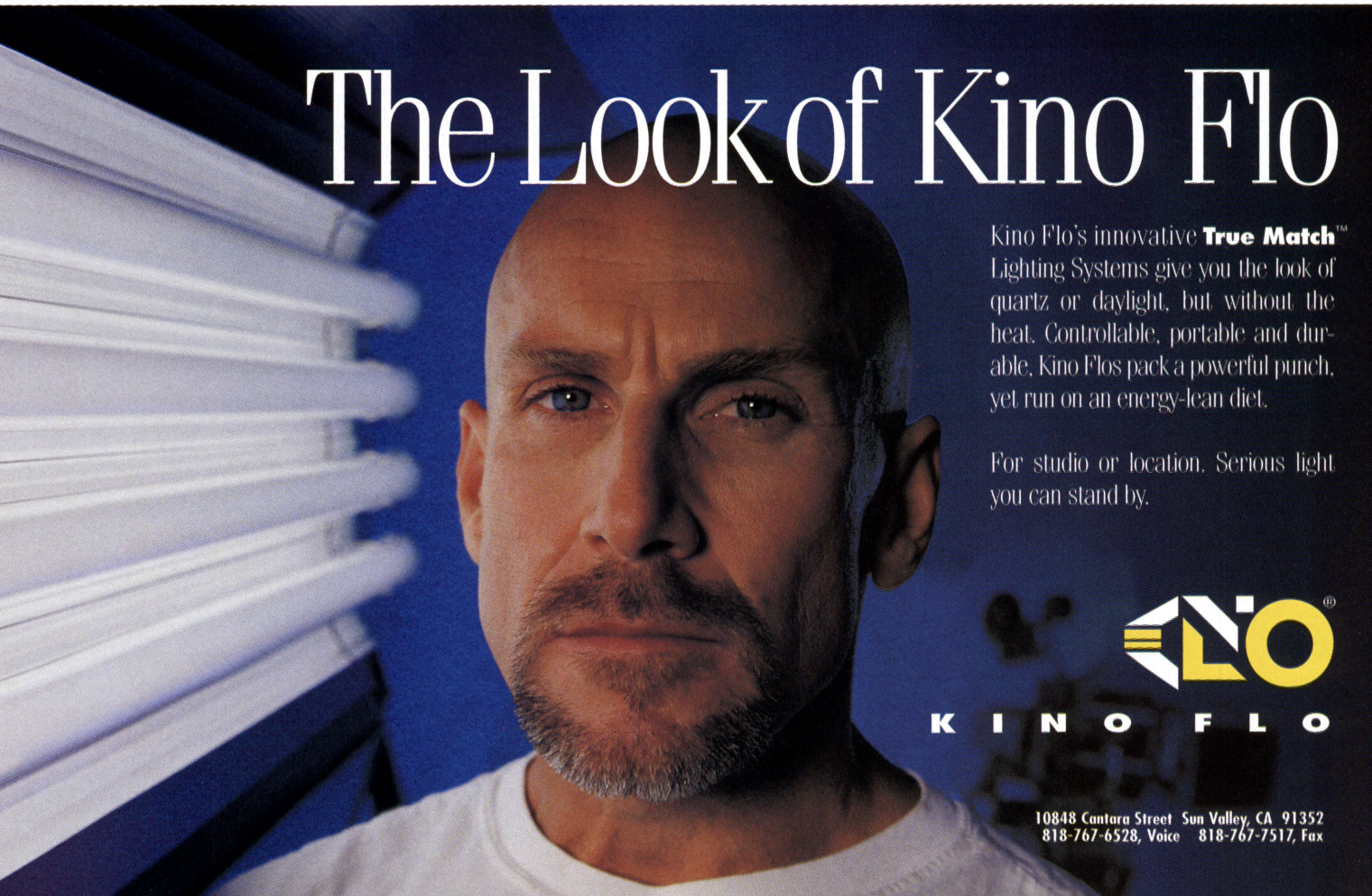
Into the Sunset

The release-print work on *Wild Wild West* was done at Technicolor, where Dale Grahn and Ballhaus supervised the color timing. The cameraman notes, "We've done a couple of movies together, and Dale also supervised our dailies. I have a special deal with Technicolor so that the person who oversees the answer print will always be whoever was in charge of the dailies. That helps a lot, because it ensures that he will know as much as possible about the film, and follow through on things we were trying to do during production."

Asked what he learned while making *Wild Wild West*, Ballhaus replies, "Prior to this film, I had never thought of myself as having a particular photographic style. I felt that all of my previous films looked a bit different, and that the look was suggested more by the material than my own work. But with Barry, I learned that I do have a style — one based on my preferences for doing things in certain ways. On this film, I learned some different techniques for doing things — such as using very wide lenses, which I enjoyed.

"Films like this are like an enormous puzzle, and because of the mixture of motion control, CGI work and so forth, no one person is in total control. I'd have to say that *Wild Wild West* was the most technically demanding film I have made."

Ballhaus recently started work on *What Planet Are You From?*, a comedy directed by Mike Nichols. "It's a science-fiction story about people from another planet who want to take over the Earth," Ballhaus explains with a smile. "Their plan is to get a human woman pregnant with an alien baby, but that means one of them has to learn how to romance her. It's a very funny idea." ■



High-Tech Noon

ILM saddles up to create a frontier landscape unlike any other for *Wild Wild West.*

by Ron Magid

Photography by Bruce W. Talamon, Murray Close and Rafael Winer

Gadget-laden lawman James West, that James Bond of the TV frontier, gets a silver-screen makeover in director Barry Sonnenfeld's *Wild Wild West.* His new nemesis is Dr. Arliss Loveless, who holds President Ulysses S. Grant captive while threatening to destroy the western frontier with a weapon of mass destruction. To electrify the mayhem in this new big-screen adventure, the Industrial Light & Magic has harnessed their Silicon Graphics hard drives and hordes of custom software.

Fans of the original TV series, which was steeped in bizarre steam-driven fantasy technology, will spark to the fantastic Jules Verne feel of Sonnenfeld's quirky epic, which is replete with grinding gears and outrageous machinery. As the director notes, however, these retrofuturistic devices are not the only difference between the gadget-filled Western and his previous picture, the sci-fi comedy *Men in Black.* "*Wild Wild West* is much more of an action movie," he maintains. "There are actually many more visual effects, so it feels bigger. At the end of the day, I always felt that *Men in Black* was a very small, intimate film with a few big setpieces, like the climax at the

Photos courtesy of Warner Bros. and ILM

World's Fair. [See *AC* Dec. 1997 for details.] *Wild Wild West* is a big buddy movie. It's interesting because of the relationships — Will Smith [as James West] and Kevin Kline [as Artemus Gordon] work great together. The two films are also very similar in that the comedy comes out through the tone."

Overseeing the film's digital work was ILM visual effects supervisor and *MIB* veteran Eric Brevig, who joined *West* at Sonnenfeld's insistence. "It's a lot like *Men in Black,* but with cowboys," Brevig agrees. "If you've seen the TV show, you know that it deals with a science-fiction-like aspect of the Old West. Since this is a big Hollywood movie with high production values, that [aesthetic] has been pushed to the maximum."

As a testament to Sonnenfeld's trust in Brevig, the director nearly took *Wild Wild West* to another visual effects house when the effects artist wasn't sure he'd be available. Sonnenfeld eventually returned to ILM out of respect for their excellent work, and Brevig was coaxed back to the project. "On *Men in Black,* he really got a sense that my vision was compatible with his," says Brevig. "Barry understands that to me, the story's more important than any little technical aspect of a shot. He's also comfortable with my aesthetic — my sense of what looks real or not. Knowing that I'm a perfectionist about both the look and the dramatic storytelling, Barry allowed me to shoot certain sequences on my own without worrying that they would go off in a weird direction. He also knows I'm trying to get effects onscreen that serve the movie, as inexpensively as possible."

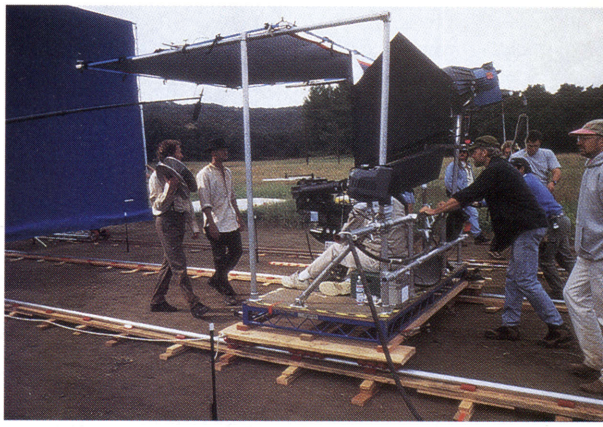
In the case of *Wild Wild West,* Brevig's task was daunting; his team had to deliver over 400 shots in about two-thirds the time they actually needed. "We had about nine months of post on *Men in Black,* compared to about six months for this show," Brevig says. "Plus, a lot of shots couldn't be started early, and had to be sorted out in postproduction — whereas we had a running start on the effects for *Men in Black.*"

It's interesting to note that the film also boasts a lot of subtle effects work — including several digital matte paintings — that add tremendously to its epic scale. Take, for instance, a simple sequence in which West rides his horse to the White House, circa 1869. "As West is riding down Pennsylvania Avenue, we see the Capitol Dome being built in the distance," Brevig details. "We could never afford to build such an expansive period set, but we were really able to give *Wild Wild West* higher production value by doing a lot of composite work.

"Believe it or not, that scene was actually shot at Woodley Park in Van Nuys," Brevig adds. "The production just built a road and some sidewalks in the middle of the grass, and put up a big bluescreen where the White House would be. We then added a matte painting that was mapped onto 3-D surfaces, and matched to the camera move. When Will gets off the horse, it really looks as if the White House is behind him — the camera even cranes up and pushes in as he walks down the path to the entrance. There are a lot of shots like that in the film — compositions that are 20 percent real set and 80 percent synthetic location — and they really give the story a sense of authenticity."

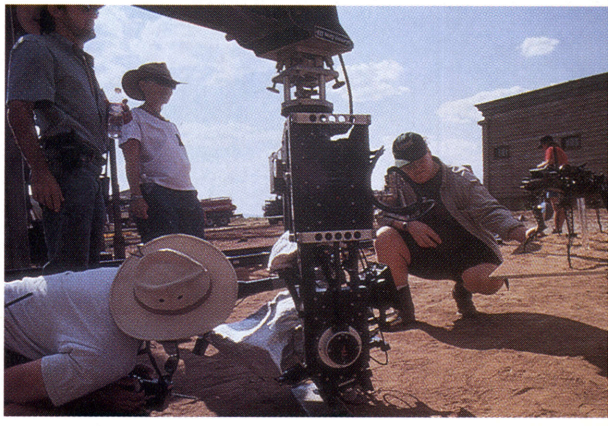
Also adding to the film's period feel is West and Gordon's vehicle of choice: a steam locomotive dubbed The Wanderer, which rides the rails of the Old West and escorts our heroes to various hotspots hidden amidst the sagebrush. "A lot of *West*'s effects have to do with scenes done on the train," Sonnenfeld says. "That was all shot bluescreen, and then ILM had to comp in backgrounds of various parts of the country throughout the characters' journey."

Brevig tallies, "There are probably 60 shots or so where we've just put in backgrounds behind Will [Smith] and Kevin [Kline] on the train. All of the train interiors were shot on stage with bluescreen behind the windows for the convenience of the production."



Of course, ILM also lent the production some of the Bond-style derring-do that endeared the original series to its fans. According to the narrative, the Wanderer has been tricked out with gadgets by its owner, Artemus Gordon, to protect it from sabotage. Our heroes' first meeting is hardly the most cordial of introductions, and climaxes with West and Gordon grappling on a pool table in the middle of the car. Fashioned with a faux bottom, the table flips upside-down, and the duo find themselves hanging onto the speeding locomotive's underbelly, mere inches from the sparking metal train tracks.

Many effects artists would have been content to shoot this wild rail-ride on a soundstage against bluescreen, but Brevig had another



Opposite: West and Gordon are confronted by the Tarantula, a uniquely complex CG creation. Above: Co-stars Kevin Kline and Will Smith are photographed with ILM's VistaVision rig for an effects shot. Below: A model of the Tarantula is shot on location in order to give ILM's artists a lighting reference for their full-scale CGI version of the vehicle, which would later be added digitally.

Hi-Tech Noon

Right: President Grant is forced to watch as Loveless uses the Tarantula to flatten the town of Silverado. Much of the destruction was done full-scale at the Cook Ranch in northern New Mexico and in Idaho (below), where the action was photographed under the direction of visual effects supervisor Eric Brevig.

idea — one that was less costly and far more realistic-looking. "The idea was that Kevin is completely upside-down, head down, while Will is lowering himself onto a special little mechanical go-cart built by Gordon. The cart travels along the rails, allowing its passenger to sneak under other trains," he details. "I felt there had to be a way to safely position Will and Kevin on the fake underside of the train. I thought that would look much more realistic than doing it all with bluescreen. [Stunt co-ordinator] Terry Leonard and I were each directing second-unit sequences, so he and his crew mocked up a train bottom and put it on the rails. When we strapped Will and Kevin in, they were riding upside-down with their faces a foot or two above the rail. Nobody thought that Will and Kevin would do it, but eventually the stuntmen rigged it so safely that non-actors were taking turns riding it for fun. It was still a bit risky, but the guys gave it a try and ended up doing that part of the sequence for real."

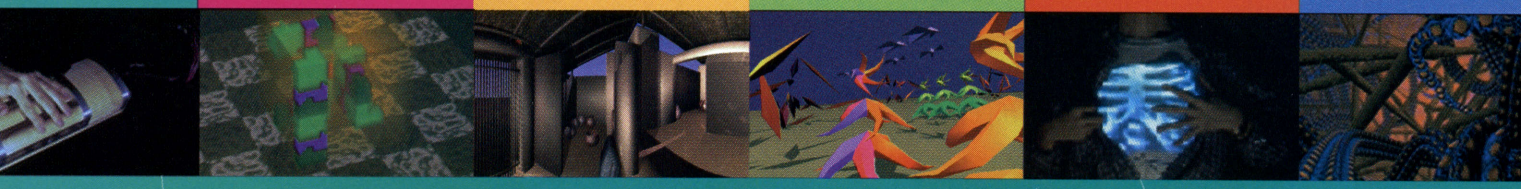
ILM also had a hand in creating Dr. Loveless's tank-train, an ironclad fortress that could hoist itself right off the rails, hide behind a railroad tunnel and get the drop on West and Gordon on the other side. Brevig and associate visual effects supervisor Pablo Herman married the full-sized tank-train set to a matching CG model with extendable spider-like legs, then completed the effect with photographic elements of real steam.

The sinister Dr. Arliss Loveless (Kenneth Branagh) finally captures West and Gordon, but instead of disposing of them outright, he hews to Hollywood's long tradition of high-camp villainy by placing them in a fateful predicament and then leaving the scene. Ingeniously sadistic, Loveless forces our heroes to don unwieldy metal collars measuring some 3' in diameter and equipped with super-magnets; he then uses a bizarre launching device to fire table-saw-like blades at them like giant Chinese throwing stars. "The device looks like a giant compact-discs launcher," Brevig suggests. "The idea is that these spinning blades will follow the guys wherever they run, catch up with them and cut off their heads. There are probably 20 to 30 effects shots in the sequence, because the blades are either CG or on a rig that had to be removed." These difficult composites were overseen by Pablo Helman Because the sequence was staged in a cornfield, Helman's animators added in sprays of digital corn flying by as the blades slash through the crops.

The film's most eccentric device was designed to spectacularly overcompensate for the villain's physical shortcomings. A double-amputee confined to a bizarre wheelchair, Dr. Loveless stalks the countryside in a massive mechanical vehicle dubbed the Tarantula. "Because so much of him is missing, we thought that the perfect weapon of destruction for him would be this 80' mechanical spider!" exults Sonnenfeld. "We felt that Loveless would probably have 'leg envy,' so he has a device that walks on eight legs!"

This steam-driven juggernaut has become the signature effect of *Wild Wild West*. Sonnenfeld explains, "It's perfect for walking over mesas and canyons, plus it can rise up or slink down as if it's an animal. We wanted something that would stretch what was possible for the time but still be believable, and we felt that an 80' mechanical spider was science-fiction verging on state of the art."

Continued on page 52.



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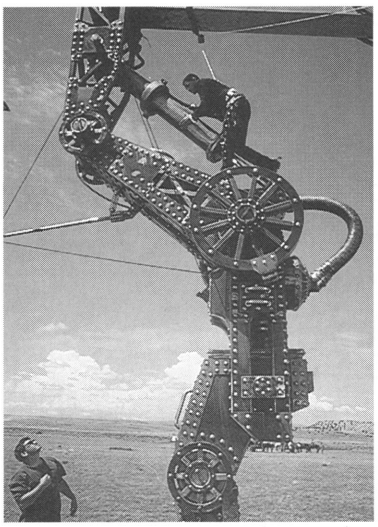
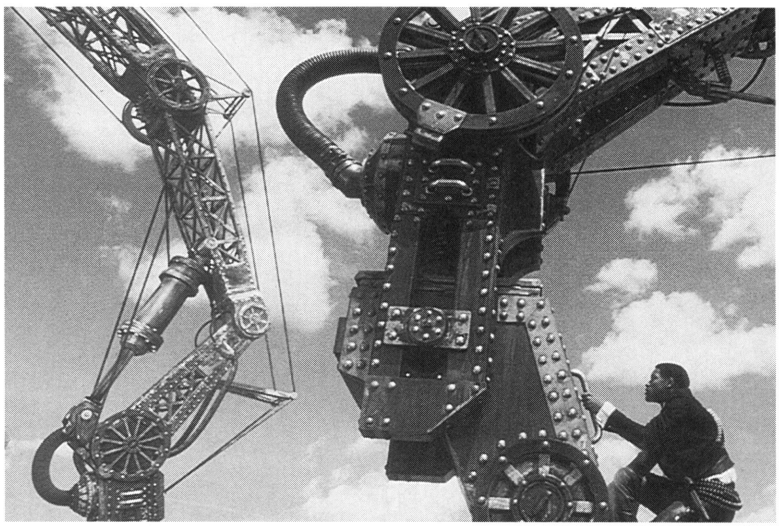
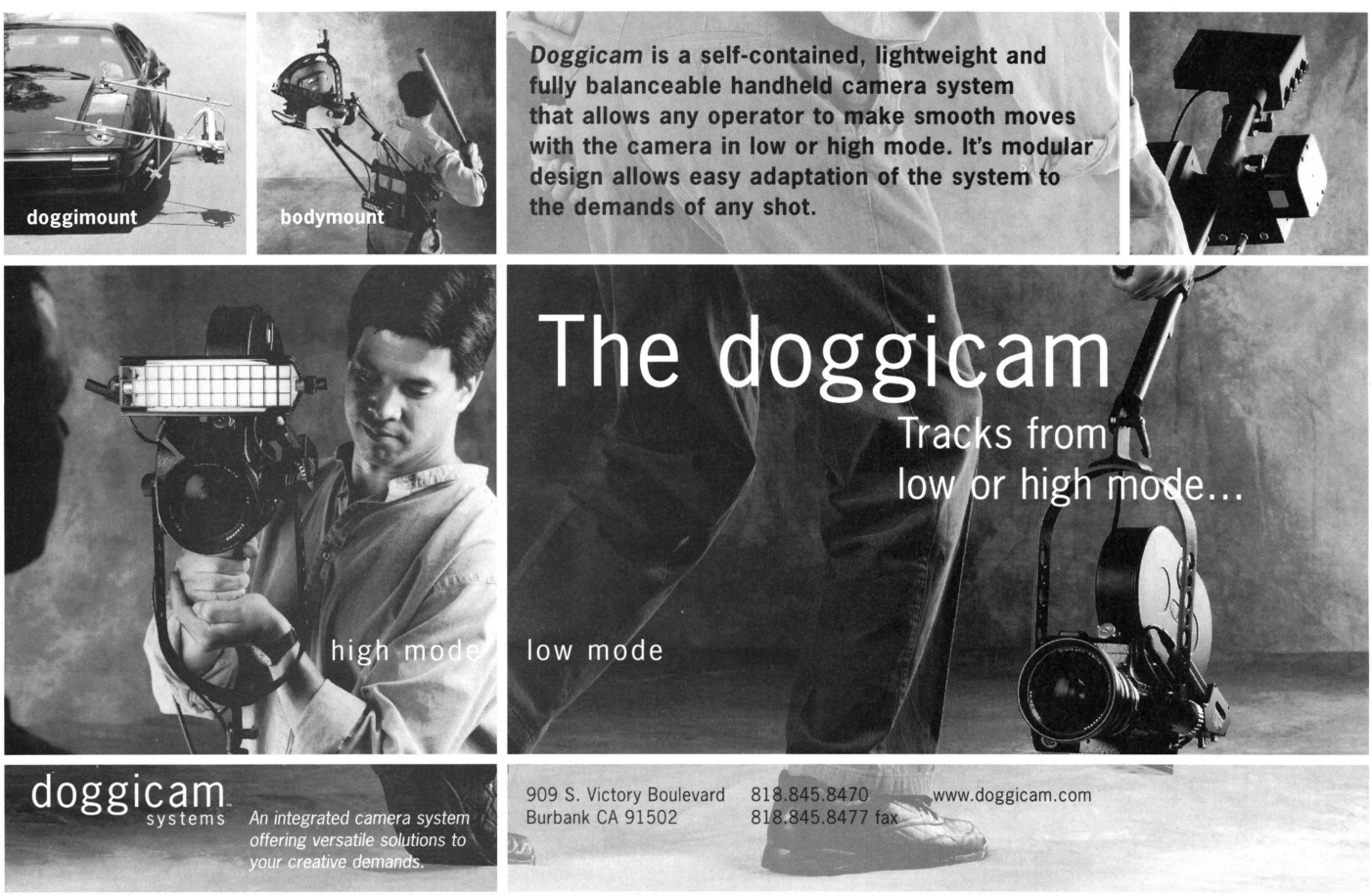




Actor Will Smith is carefully secured by safety lines as he scales a full-scale mockup of one of the Tarantula's legs. The wires were later removed and additional CG legs were added to complete the illusion.

In reality, the production built only one leg of the gargantuan Verne-like walking machine. This created countless headaches for ILM's modelers, who had to construct the complex machine entirely in the computer. With hundreds of moving parts, the giant Tarantula was the most intricate CG model ever built by ILM. Brevig explains, "In addition to its rigid, girded latticework structure, it also has dangling cables and hoses whose movements had to be realistically created using dynamic simulations. Since it's supposedly steam-powered, it also vents steam in the course of its walk cycle. Plus, we wanted it to appear as if it was aged and dripping oil, so we did a lot of digital paint-work and animation on its surfaces to create the look of a really greasy, oily, machine."

In true Master-of-the-World



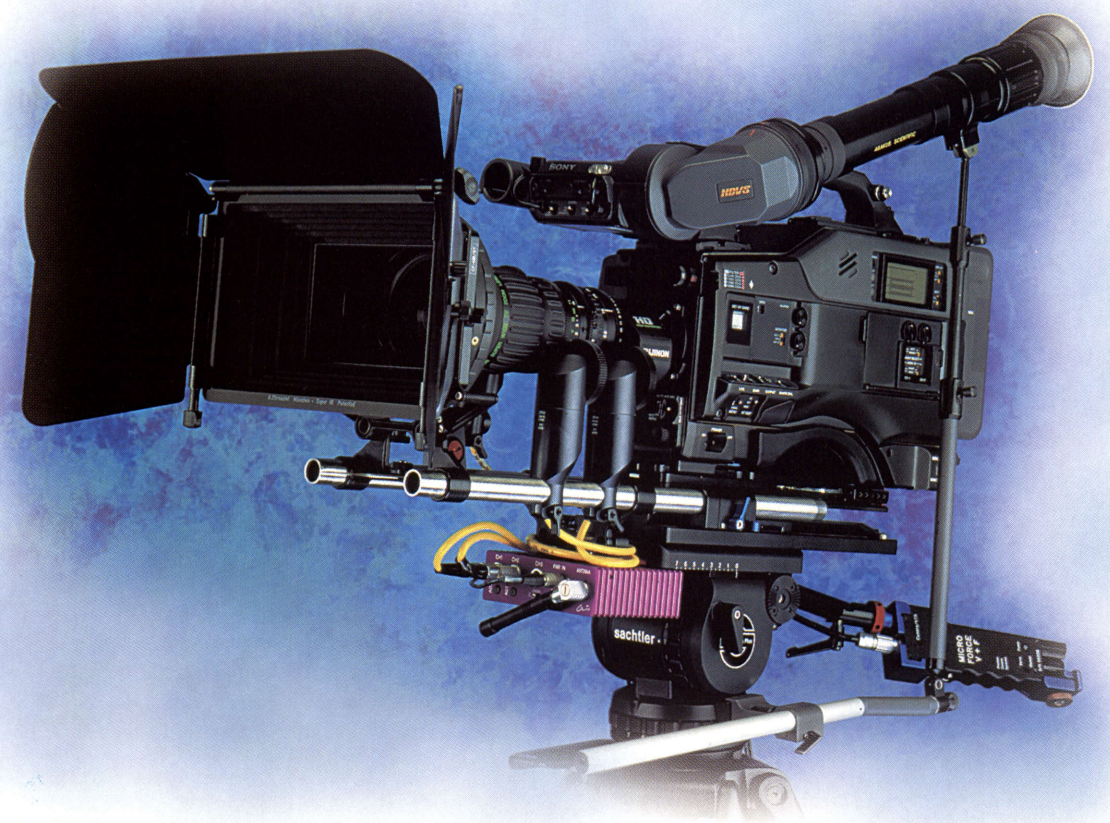
fashion, Loveless proves the awesome power of his war machine by stomping the Tarantula through the town of Silverado, decimating all of the buildings on its main street. "He's demonstrating what he's going to do thoughout the nation if Grant does not sign the United States over to the South," Brevig notes with a chuckle. "I directed the sequence at Cook Ranch near Santa Fe, where we used explosives to blow up specific buildings. We choreographed the explosions building by building, so we could later incorporate this 80' mechanical beast into the shots and make it stomp through the town, shooting at the buildings that were really exploding, with stuntmen running in the foreground. Ed Hirsh, my co-supervisor, shot additional backgrounds in Arizona using ¼-scale miniature buildings on fire for shots we couldn't get on location."

The sequence was further complicated because the narrative required Brevig to place Loveless and others at the helm of the giant mechanical beast. "I shot the actors against bluescreen on a full-sized mock-up of the head mounted on a motion base, which was programmed to move in the same walking pattern as the CG Tarantula," the effects artist recalls. "Then we composited the actors onto the head of the CG Tarantula. In several shots, the head bends down as this 'creature' is walking, and the actors appear to be standing on a balcony out in the sunlight."

To conquer this maniacal, mechanized arachnid, the undercover agents opt for an aerial assault. "At the climactic moment, West and Gordon board their rocket-powered glider — the Wasp — and go off to rescue the President," reveals Sonnenfeld. "They attack the Tarantula in this little airplane, and there's a brief aerial battle before they crash-land. It's all in service to the plot of the movie, but a lot of the action had to be done synthetically with effects."

For Brevig and his ILM compatriots, the challenge of this sequence was "combining actors shot in front of bluescreen on a real prop glider with synthetic CG models of the actors and the glider flying in wide shots."

Wild Wild West may be the latest entry in the TV-show-turned-feature genre, but in the capable hands of Sonnenfeld and his compatriots at ILM, this gunslinging period piece promises to be one of this summer's more memorable movie events. Assessing his handiwork, the director concludes, "*Wild Wild West* feels much more like a Jules Verne movie than a Western, or like a science-fiction movie that was shot in the 1860s — it's retro sci-fi." ■



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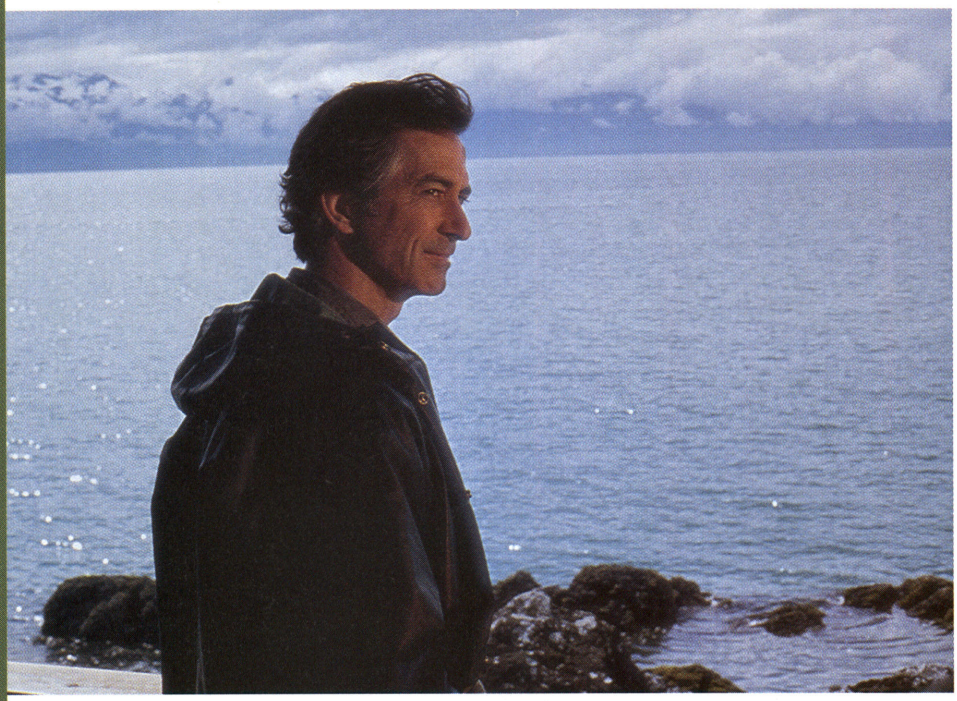


Joe Gastineau (David Strathairn) faces down demons caused by a tragic boating accident in his past.

Director of photography Haskell Wexler, ASC discusses his third collaboration with celebrated writer/director John Sayles on *Limbo.*

Interview by Conrad Hall, ASC

Edited by Christopher Probst

Photography by K.C. Bailey

Writer/director John Sayles's new film, *Limbo,* marks his third collaboration with esteemed director of photography Haskell Wexler, ASC, who had previously lent his talents to Sayles's period drama *Matewan* (see *AC* April '88) and romantic fantasy *The Secret of Roan Inish* (*AC* Feb. '95).

Limbo tells the story of several people who are trying to reinvent themselves in the Southeastern islands of Alaska. The story revolves around Joe Gastineau (David Strathairn), a fisherman traumatized by an accident at sea years before, who meets singer Donna de Angelo (Mary Elizabeth Mastrantonio) and her disaffected daughter, Noelle (Vanessa Martinez).

Shot in the summer of 1998, the picture was photographed entirely in and around the remote town of Juneau, Alaska. Despite the location's distance from any major production resources, Sayles was determined to capture the local flavor and characteristics of the small town. Indeed, many residents of the town ended up either appearing in or working on the picture.

AC's interviewer, Conrad Hall, ASC, shares a remarkable history with Wexler. Early in their careers, the duo paired up to form a commercial production company for which they both directed and shot spots for a number of years. Hall recently earned his eighth Academy Award nomination for *A Civil Action* (*AC* Jan. and June '99); he took home an Oscar in 1969 for *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid.* He recently completed photography on the dramatic comedy *American Beauty.*

Wexler and Hall recently sat down at the ASC Clubhouse in Hollywood to discuss the former's work on *Limbo,* as well as their collective century's worth of experience in the film industry and other topics. — Christopher Probst

Conrad Hall: I wanted to start off by saying that this is my first time on the other side of the equation — interviewing somebody like you, Haskell. Please excuse me if I ask a lot of dumb questions. I'm going to try

Photos courtesy of Columbia/TriStar.

to ask *leading* questions so that we can find out what happened during the making of *Limbo*. Now, did you consider the script before you accepted the film, and did you discuss it with John?

Wexler: When John asks me to shoot, I say yes. Working with John has always been a good experience.

Hall: I assume that you liked the script then.

Wexler: Yes, I did — particularly the parts regarding the mother and the daughter.

Hall: When I shoot a film, I try to get into the whole process as much as possible, which [in turn] motivates my photography. When you read a script, don't you have feelings that you want to communicate to the director that allows him to clarify the reasoning behind his decisions?

Wexler: The director owes it to the cinematographer to reveal his feelings about what the mood of the script is, and John gives you that. John is an unusual and brilliant individual who has a total vision of the film in his head even before a camera is touched. It's in his scripts — he writes backstories for all of the characters, so each actor gets a complete history of their character's life. My job is to try to discover what he has in mind, and because what John has in mind is usually quite complex and personal, that takes work.

Hall: That seems as if it could be somewhat limiting to others creatively.

Wexler: In some ways, it makes it easier. John works hard before any of the crew shows up. He picks locations, knows the tide tables and generally knows what he wants to see in the frame. For example, he did not want to see the bad guys — he just wanted to see their legs and feet. Other directors might say, "Get me some shots through trees seeing some upper body just in case I may want to use it." John has always worked with very low budgets and has trained himself to be economical, with no options and not a lot of takes. He wants to be true to his script — his original, first creation of the film in his head.

Hall: So where do you, the director of photography, fit in?

Wexler: Well, I need to do my job! I have to listen, watch and tune in to a very sensitive man's frequency. From a photographic point of view, I felt on this film that I had to be — and I hesitate to use the word — as honest as I could be, and use as little artifice as possible.

American Cinematographer: *Limbo*'s structure is somewhat unconventional. Normally, a film sets up a premise and then uses the majority of its time to address that premise. Here, Sayles sets up an entire history of this small Alaskan town, and then in the second half of the film, he takes you into a radically different storyline and intent. Did you have concerns as a cinematographer and storyteller about the unconventional way the script was laid out and how that would be translated photographically?

Hall: Yes, Haskell, I liked the picture, but it did feel as if it was almost two separate films. I would have liked to have seen some intercutting with the characters we meet during the first half of the film.

Wexler: Obviously, John knows what he's doing. He wanted to have two different 'films' within *Limbo*. Yes, the interesting Alaskan people we meet in the first half of the film go away fairly quickly, but John wanted to concentrate the drama on the characters stranded on the island. I think he believes that by filmically separating the three main characters on the deserted island, their relationship is intensified. I did write to him [early on] an ask about that very thing.

Hall: What did he reply?

Wexler: Actually, I don't think he did. Or maybe he said something like 'Don't worry about it.' [Laughs.]

Hall: Did that satisfy you?

Wexler: Working on John's films has been sort of an adventure for me. I've learned he sometimes has things in his mind that I don't see on the page. By shooting his films and then seeing them in their finished form, I've learned something about the complexity of his mind, and about directing and character development. That was the case on *Roan Inish*, and on *Limbo* as well. John works in a kind of way that I don't personally think I'd be capable of if I were directing.

John makes the whole film — more so, perhaps, than anyone else in Hollywood. He writes, directs it and edits it. He was there with his comments after I timed the first answer print. Also, in general, no one — and certainly not me — *tells* John what to do, especially about scriptwriting. Now, I say that in praise of John, rather than in criticism. But I did tell him that I felt as if the script was *two* good scripts —

Above: Stranded on a remote island, the hapless castaways construct a signal fire. The location chosen to convey their sense of isolation was indeed quite isolated. Cast and crew had to hike 45 minutes to reach the area, hand-carrying their props and gear. Below: Director of photography Haskell Wexler, ASC (in hat) and writer/director John Sayles (right) block out an intricate Steadicam shot that opens an early scene set at a wedding banquet.

Island of Lost Souls

that I missed the interesting people he'd presented to us at the beginning. This was his intention, no question. Life is open ended. Narrative movie drama can have an open end, even though we are conditioned for "bang bang" resolutions.

Hall: *Limbo* begins with a sequence that introduces all of the characters, as the camera moves seamlessly through a party in one shot. One character leads you from one group of people to another group. How did you go about setting that scene up? Did John rehearse with the actors first?

Wexler: John wanted to begin that scene by showing the little girl, Noelle [Vanessa Martinez], offering hors d'oeuvres directly to the camera, and then having the camera follow her through the party. We'd then break off from her at different points to little scenes of characters. I'm pleased that you felt it was seamless, Conrad, because there actually are several cuts. Because of the flow of the Steadicam and a few small dolly moves, it does feel like a single, continuous shot.

Hall: Watching the film, I don't remember seeing a single shot with any sunshine at all. Was this a deliberate attempt to cast an atmospheric mood on the characters' lives or was that just typical Juneau weather?

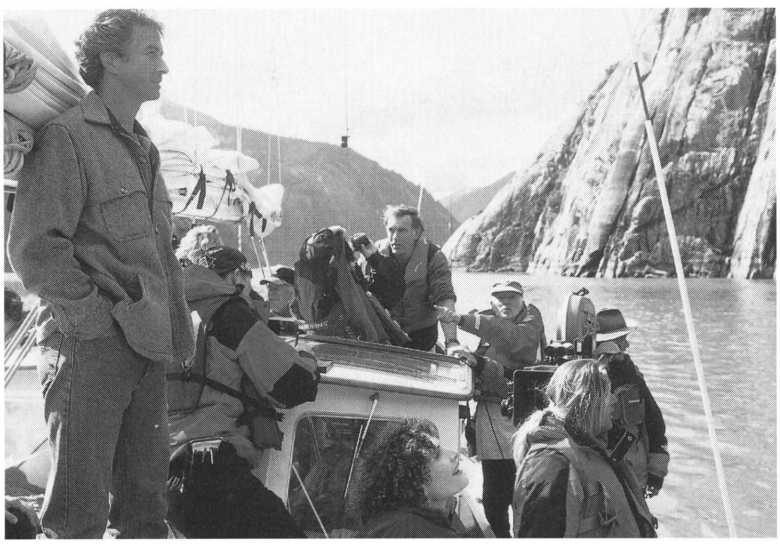
Wexler: It was a deliberate attempt by God to not let the sun shine during the filming!

Hall: Ah, your gaffer!

Wexler: The gaffer in the sky.

Hall: Gaffer with a capital G!

Wexler: Actually, a number of times I was praying for some sunlight, because we did have some day-for-night shots that I would have liked to have built some contrast into. It rained on us every single day, and even during the party sequence you may see some streaks behind Mary Elizabeth Mastrantonio as she's singing. I wanted that scene to be brighter, and since I knew we were in the rainy season, I overexposed, giving it a very full exposure. I also asked for plenty of white tablecloths to try to create a more dramatic visual contrast with what was going to be happening later on in the film.



Taking advantage of available light, Wexler and Sayles (to the left of camera) set up a shot of Joe and Donna while filming a waterbound sequence aboard a practical boat. Details Wexler, "The boat's running lights and mast lights were all quartz or PH bulbs on dimmers. We had a Honda generator onboard, or lashed off the off-camera side, although we sometimes we had to run off of batteries."

AC: Did you have a certain strategy in mind to deal with the extensive exterior work? Was there a particular way you were either modifying the light with lighting or grip equipment, or did you try to schedule around certain locations to help capture the quality of light you were looking for?

Wexler: With a budget like this, if you're scheduled to do something, you shoot it! You shoot if it's raining, light or dark. We didn't have cover sets that were convenient. The woods location was a 45-minute from town, where the interior sets had been built inside an old grocery store. For most of the exterior work, I used Kodak's Vision 250D [5246] film, which I liked very much for our particular situation.

Hall: Was the area where the characters are stranded located nearby? Was it easily accessible? It felt very isolated.

Wexler: If it felt isolated, our strategy worked. The closest wooded area was just down near a narrow highway. The abandoned cabin the characters find was about a 10-minute walk into the woods. Part of the location — the spot where the characters build a signal fire — *was* quite isolated, and we had to walk to it when the tide was out, carrying our equipment for about 40 minutes. That area was chosen because we had to find a place where a plane could land. All of the shooting there required careful planning around the tides. At one time of day you could think you were at a seashore with the trees right behind you, and then at another time you couldn't see the waterline. John likes to feel some physical adversity if it's supposed to be there; that approach may help the actors, but I don't think it necessarily helps the crew!

AC: Did you ever bring in equipment during the daylight scenes to modify the lighting scheme?

Wexler: On some of the close-ups outside, I would use lights to build some contrast. A few times on the beach, I used lights to lift the characters out of the flatness. In the heavily wooded area, it was too difficult to bring in lights.

Hall: How did you approach the night scenes there then without the heavy artillery you'd have on a conventional night shoot?

Wexler: In the summer in Alaska, there's not much night, which the call sheets termed 'Alaskan

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Island of Lost Souls

Right: Actress Mary Elizabeth Mastrantonio provided vocals for the film's soundtrack, including songs for performance scenes involving her character, Donna de Angelo. The bar set was constructed inside an empty grocery store, which served as the production's soundstage. Below: Key grip Steve Lang pulled double duty in the film, and is shown here in character as Vic, the bartender at Juneau's local watering-hole.

Nights.' There were only about four hours of what we would call real *night*. We were shooting day-for-night scenes at 10 p.m.! When we were in the woods, we didn't have the budget to put larger units on industrial cranes or cherry-pickers to plow some strong 'moonlight' through the trees. Of course, without putting some light in there, we ran the risk of making the nights look fairly muddy.

Hall: How did you deal with the day-for-night work under those circumstances?

Wexler: As you know, in doing day-for-night, you have to fight the sky. I actually asked John if we could have an actor say something to the effect of, 'Geez, in Alaska, it never gets dark!' [Laughs.] Since it was rainy and overcast with no blue skies, we used various grads, tree branches and framed-in hillsides to knock the sky down a bit.

Hall: I did notice some hot little sky spots through the trees in one of the scenes in the woods.

Wexler: Yes, in that instance, the ND .6 grad I had set went into [actor] David Strathairn's head, so I had to yank it. We put a tree branch in close to the camera instead, but the leaves weren't thick enough. All of the night scenes except one were shot in the 'day' time.

Hall: Was that one exception the scene in which Joe [Strathairn] comes up in the water after his boat sinks?

Wexler: Right! That scene was a flashback, and it was the only scene we shot in real, black night, because John wanted it to have a darker look. He wanted it to look different, but not *too* different. I used [Vision 500T] 5279, which I pushed to 2000 ASA, and added a net to try to degrade the imagery somewhat and make it stand out.

Hall: It didn't look very degraded…

Wexler: I was also surprised that it didn't look degraded. I should talk to Bob Richardson [ASC], because he really knows how to do that stuff better. I shot the scene a several different speeds, and I think John ended up step-printing the scene for further effect.

Hall: I actually didn't realize the effect that the overall look of *Limbo* had on me until I was walking out of the theater and thought about how nice it was to finally feel sunshine. The film had a kind of pervasively claustrophobic gloom that lent to the quality of the character's lives. There's something about the sun hitting your face that makes you feel wonderful. As you said, though, that feeling wasn't something you waited for — it was created by the 'gaffer in the sky.' Did you shoot when the sun was out too?

Wexler: As you know Conrad, in a way it can be easier to have overcast light for exteriors…

Hall: I'm not sure if I agree with that, actually. I think it's harder to get contrast in overcast conditions, and I'm always interested in contrast. The only contrast you do get on an overcast day is color contrast — blue against green, for example. If I had a day like that, I'd throw a large black over the actors and put them in a darker silhouette against the brighter background in order to change the almost pervasive beauty of the situation, because the [natural scenery] is so colorful. In a way, the colors can be more saturated in that even, overcast

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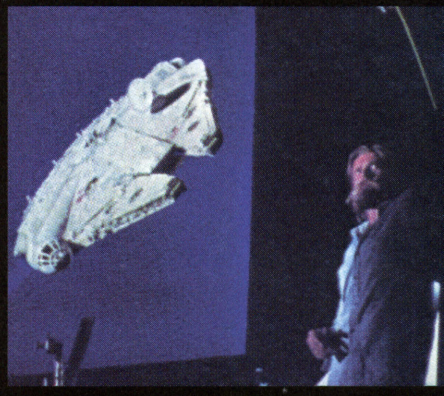

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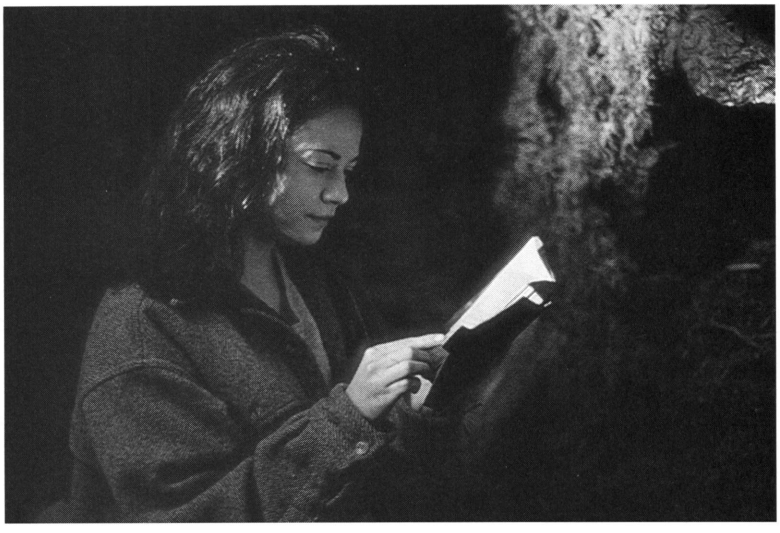
Island of Lost Souls



Donna's daughter, Noelle (Vanessa Martinez) reads from a diary discovered in an abandoned cabin on the island purgatory. The cabin interior was also constructed within the grocery store-turned-soundstage. Here, dappled daylight filters between the shack's creaky boards. For other sequences, Wexler dimly illuminated the characters with "firelight" generated by both real flames and small, CTO-gelled units on dimmers.

light — unless, of course, one overexposes the way you did.

Wexler: Well, I'll add that *Limbo* was my first experience with the new Vision print stock. The fact that everything was pretty soft to begin with, along with the added contrast of the new stock, seems to give the final print much more contrast than we had in our [5386] dailies.

Hall: I'm well aware of that, having done *A Civil Action* just before you timed your picture. I agree that the new prints stocks are much more contrasty. In fact, I was shooting when they made the change, and I had to figure out how to overcome that. Eastman Kodak provided me with a new [negative] stock, a batch of 79 that was five percent less contrasty. That helped a bit.

AC: Haskell, did you shoot all of the exteriors for *Limbo* on the Vision 250D?

Wexler: No, I also shot some of them on [EXR] 5245. I'd usually tell the loader [Viki Redding] to put up some 45, then maybe we'd get a shot or two in before the sun would duck back behind some clouds and we'd have to go to the 250D. In general, I prefer to use 45 whenever I can, because I really like that stock. So much really depends upon what's in front of the camera. The sky can be essentially the same sky, but the color of the buildings, the trees, the roads and even the wardrobe has much to do with the illusion of what the light is like.

AC: For the interiors, did you use Vision 500T 5279?

Wexler: Yes.

Hall: How did you view your dailies?

Wexler: We had a 'production office' in this warehouse, and we had a portable projector. We would get dailies about three days later. There's no really fast way to get up to Juneau. We processed the film at CFI in Hollywood, although I did do some tests with a good lab in Seattle. In the end, I decided that I wanted to go with a place that I'd worked with before — even though that decision resulted in dailies arriving a day later.

AC: Was there a distinct tone that you were trying to create in the first half of the film that you intentionally changed in the second half? In the later scenes, the look seemed to be much cooler and darker — except, of course, for the interior cabin scenes, where the characters are lit by firelight.

Wexler: I didn't do that consciously. The look changed because it was such a different location. The island is supposed to read as 'hardship' and 'isolation.' You mentioned the use of fire. The interior of the cabin was again on our 'stage' built inside the grocery store. It was very small, so there was hardly any room outside the set walls. For certain firelit shots inside the cabin, I tried to light with the fire itself and flame bars off-camera. When I did light the actors, I had one lamp that I would wave my fingers in front of while an electrician on a dimmer changed the density. There were a couple of times in the cabin where Noelle was reading from a diary by the firelight and I wanted to see her eyes. For those shots, I wrapped some rope-light around the matte-box to get a glint in her eyes without producing an obvious source. I loved lighting Vanessa. I really liked her face and expressiveness. I worked to give her a good eyelight whenever she would reveal them. Revealing her eyes was an essential story point.

Hall: Was *Limbo* a Panavision shoot?

Wexler: I own a Moviecam Compact and two zoom lenses: a Cooke 18-100mm and an Angenieux 25-250mm. I used the zooms for almost everything except a few low-key shots.

Hall: Is there an advantage to owning your own equipment?

Wexler: Well, since we were working in a relatively inaccessible place like Juneau, it was a distinct advantage for the producer! We had to decide early on what additional equipment we needed, since shipping in and out of Alaska was not terribly fast. Fortunately, I get incredible backup from Denny Clairmont, so every additional item we rented from him arrived fully checked-out and compatible with my gear. For instance, we shot a lot of material for the film's opening credits, during which you see salmon swimming underwater. The camera begins underwater, and then comes to the surface. We used a periscope fitted with Zeiss Superspeeds. Denny rents a [special filter attachment] that we jokingly referred to as a 'condom.' It has an optical flat that screws onto

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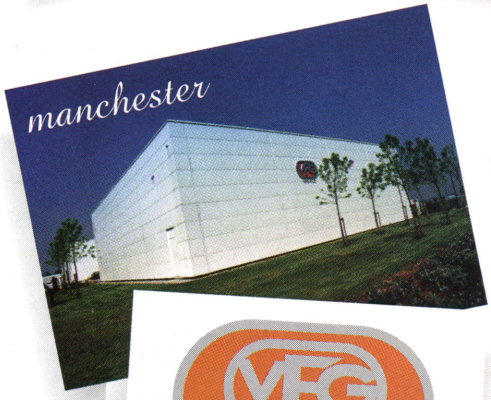

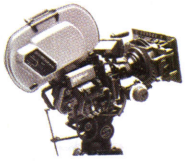

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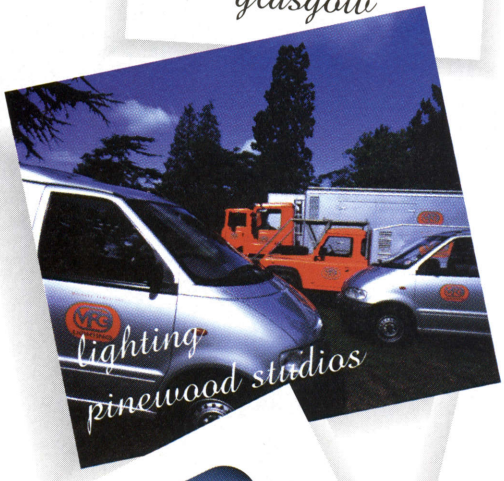

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the lens and then pulls up like a sheath over the snorkel, making the whole unit watertight. I used it to go in between the fish. At first, we put Scott with underwater gear in amongst the fish, but that scared the fish and they avoided him. Instead, we lowered the periscope and moved the periscope through them — the only equipment that was actually in the water was this narrow pipe.

Hall: There was one aerial shot in the film that pulled back from a close-up to reveal a kind of misty fog.

Wexler: Are you talking about the scene with David Strathairn at the signal fire?

Hall: Yes. That was a really good shot, because it pulled back and showed the vastness of the area and his isolation.

Wexler: I'm glad you noticed that pullback shot, because I believed we needed to show how isolated the characters really were. We had the helicopter there for some other shot and the budget and weather meant that we had the chopper for a short time. The helicopter came with a very beat-up old Tyler mini-mount, but Scott and [aerial camera operator] Doug Holgate went to work making it sort of operable. Scott took the arm off his Steadicam, and they used some some gaffer's tape and baling wire to attach it to the helicopter's mount.

Hall: What about the boat interiors?

Wexler: Originally, we were going to do more shots of the interiors of the boats [where the characters take shelter during a storm]. Before I saw the actual boat, I had suggested to John and [production designer] Gemma Jackson that we build the boat interior on top of rockers on our stage. But on my first day in Alaska, I shot a test on the boat handholding my trusty Eclair CM-3 while some guys pulled on lines from the mast for storm movement. I made sure there were hanging wires and lamps to show the boat's movement. The tests convinced us that we didn't need to build the sets. During the actual shooting, Scott used his Steadicam with an 18mm lens. By moving the HMIs outside and having water hoses spray the windows with the actors stumbling unsteadily, we really pulled off the illusion. Of course, we also needed a shot of the boat in a storm, but there were no storms around. Finally, on the next to the last day, we sent Doug Holgate out with my other camera to an area where the sea was rough, and he got those shots. That was the only real second-unit material in the film.

AC: Let's talk a bit about the interiors. In the first half of the film, there's a lot of interesting work in some of the bar scenes, which feature different color temperatures and

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sculptured light.

Hall: Yes, were you going for a varied color palette in those scenes?

Wexler: The bar was supposed to be the local watering-hole — a place where people just hang out. We also built that set in the grocery store. The art direction in the bar had a tremendous amount of color. Of course, it also had all of the beer signs that Gemma provided us with, as well as the pool tables and mirrors. The mirrors also helped make the set look much bigger than it really was. We also used a bit of smoke in the bar, but it was hard to keep anything in there.

Hall: How exactly did you go about lighting the bar?

Wexler: I lit the bar how I would usually approach a real interior. Gemma, my gaffer Pat Reddish and I went over Gemma's design sketches and spotted where practical lights could be. Once the practicals were lit, we were able to shoot acceptable pictures in any direction. Selecting film-friendly lights was therefore critical. Gemma hung some big, old bell-shaped fixtures over the bar, which gave us pools of light on the bar's surface, as well as toplight on the actors. Then on close-ups of the people at the bar, I tried to maintain that toplight while using a minimum of bounce or fill. The bartender in the scene, Steve Lang, was actually my grip. Since he was behind the bar, he got assigned to set his own bartender belly-light. On the wall behind him, there were glass trays with bottles, and we rigged some small [lumaline] fluorescents on the trays, masking them off to conceal the bulbs themselves. At the back of the bar, John had hung a painting that I lit with a Dedo light. For shots where I had a lamp in the frame, I would bring in a Chinese lantern from the side.

Hall: Overall, the bar seemed to have a very warm look. Did you have specific gels like CTOs on the lights?

Wexler: I did use some warming gels. I was always conscious of lighting Mary Elizabeth so that she looked good. For the stage area where Mary Elizabeth sings, for instance, John originally wanted the backdrop of the stage to be black so he could lay in some dissolves. Gemma Jackson and I convinced him that we had to have something to break it up, so we pulled back the black velvet and strung up some Christmas-tree lights.

Hall: What were some of your other locations?

Wexler: Well, for Joe's apartment, where David and Mary Elizabeth's characters make love, we shot in a real house. When the actors were on the bed, we couldn't quite get our lights around to shine into

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Island of Lost Souls

the windows. Instead, I put some lights out on the balcony of a house next door, and then bounced them into some mirrors to help bring light into the room. Mary Elizabeth looked very good in that light.

Hall: When did you get your first look at the finished film?

Wexler: When I timed the answer print. I must say that CFI did a terrific job.

Hall: How does it affect you when you watch the film for the first time, and you see whether the story came out the way you and the director had planned, or if it's cut in an entirely different way?

Wexler: John writes, directs and cuts his movies, so he is not likely to be surprised. However, in one shot where Mary Elizabeth is singing in the bar, she's way over in the left-hand side of the frame and there's a big, black, undifferentiated area on the right. I was upset when I saw that shot in the film, because John had told me that he was going to dissolve one of the boat sequences into that area of the frame. In the finished film, though, there's nothing there; it just looks like an ugly frame. Then I thought, 'Well, maybe some people like Conrad will think it's daring!' [Laughs.] Sometimes when you do stuff poorly but you've developed something of a reputation, people say, 'Wow, that's gutsy.'

Hall: What's your next project?

Wexler: I don't know when John will be ready for the next one. He's been a lifesaver for me, and I trust he will ask for me until I hang up my jockstrap. I'm currently finishing a documentary, and I plan to do more because I get a lot of enjoyment out of them. And like you, Conrad, I also have a great script that I want to direct. But if there is a great script out there with a sane director, I'd love to shoot it.

Hall: But let's say you meet a promising first-time director. How can you tell if he or she is sane?

Wexler: If it were great script, I'd have to evaluate the chemistry. Sometimes you just don't know. On this last picture you shot, Conrad [*American Beauty*], I recall that you initially thought you might have guessed wrong, then you thought maybe you guessed right, and now it seems that you guessed *very* right!

Hall: [Laughs.] Getting to know someone takes a period of time. You have to go through some experiences together to evaluate the working relationship.

Wexler: Yes, but didn't the director on *American Beauty* [Sam Mendes] bring a lot of experience with him from the stage?

Hall: Yes, he had a lot of experience. From my perspective, I now feel he's an auteur of extraordinary talent. At first I had a lot of problems with the story — so much so that I went to him and said, 'I love this story and the project, but my God, how can you like these characters?' He told me, 'Well, Conrad, you have to like them. If you don't like them, we don't have a picture here.' I then said, 'Yes, but they do such terrible things.' He replied, 'Do you have terrible thoughts sometimes that you don't necessarily act upon?' He made me see how you could make a movie about people who do and say some terrible things and yet still like them. He changed my whole way of thinking about the project.

Wexler: That's right, and in my case with *Limbo*, I trusted John's sensibilities and his grasp of the subject matter. By breaking a conventional narrative structure that viewers are almost programmed to go into a film with, and by being open to thinking about the film in a different way, John and I were able to go forward with the film in the way he saw it. I am very pleased with the results. *Limbo* was invited to the Cannes Film Festival — an honor in itself. But high on my list is your opinion of my work. Thank you, Conrad. ■

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Flower Power

First-time director Melissa Painter and veteran cinematographer Paul Ryan, ASC plumb their San Francisco pasts in *Wildflowers*, a reflective ode to 1960s ideals.

by Chris Pizzello

Photography by Ben Hurlbutt

As the Ground Zero of the counterculture movement in America, Sixties-era San Francisco has always been a milieu ripe for cinematic caricature. Because filmmakers have found it difficult to resist the period's easy snapshots — the drug-fueled rock 'n' roll scene, the cheerful psychedelia of the Haight-Ashbury district, the idyllic communes of straggly-haired, like-minded young hippies — audiences have often been subjected to clichéd or shallow portraits of the time. With her refreshingly subtle first feature *Wildflowers*, San Francisco native Melissa Painter has set out to delve deeper into the meaning of the Sixties by fast-forwarding to 1985 and examining three characters trying to reconcile their present lives with the still-powerful echoes of their indelible past.

Cally (Clea DuVall) is a 17-year-old tomboy living with her ex-hippie father, Wade (Tomas Arana), on his modest Sausalito houseboat. During her infancy, Cally was raised by her father's friends on a commune, after her mother (so she is told) went underground for political reasons soon after her birth. While attending a concert, the teenaged Cally notices a beautiful older woman named Sabine (Daryl Hannah), with whom she feels a strange, ineffable connection. A loner who's been running away from responsibility her whole life, Sabine has been drawn back to San Francisco for the first time in years by the impending death of her oldest and only trusted friend. Cally is fascinated by Sabine's wild, eccentric approach to life, and becomes increasingly involved with her. But as Cally gradually gathers clues about Sabine's past, she begins to suspect that their link may be even more profound than she first suspected.

The 31-year-old Painter grew up near San Francisco in Marin, where she personally observed the long shadow that the Sixties had cast on friends born during the era and parents who had lived through it. "The story is about how choices people made in the Sixties had repercussions on their families," she explains. "It was a different way of looking at the lasting influence of the Sixties, which I think is positive in many ways. There were also some downsides, though. I wanted to examine [the effect of the era on] families by highlighting an unusual one. Also, I've also seen too many coming-of-age stories about a young woman going through a relationship with a guy. In my own personal experience, relationships in which a young woman falls in love with an

Photos and film clips courtesy of Paul Ryan, ASC

older woman in that 'I want to grow up to be like her' way have had much more impact."

Wildflowers was developed through the Sundance Institute, on the strength of two short films — *Private Residences* and *Jump* — that Painter had made at NYU Film School. Painter sought out a cinematographer who would understand and complement her very personal vision of the project, since filming would take place entirely in San Francisco area locations that she knew well from her childhood. "I really wanted the film to have that sense of freedom and exuberance that a 17-year-old girl has," she explains. "I also wanted it to reflect my experiences growing up in the Eighties in Marin, which had a lot of really strong connections to the Sixties. I wanted to find a way to convey the area's aesthetic — the music, the looseness, the sort of psychedelic quality of the whole place —through the photography. I'd done a couple of shorts that I liked visually, but they were really austere. The photography had an almost Bergman-like formalism that didn't really express my vision or emotions."

Painter had met Paul Ryan, ASC at Sundance a few years ago, just after the veteran cinematographer had photographed *Where the Rivers Flow North* (see *AC* Feb. 1994). Ryan's other credits include *Box of Moonlight* (*AC* July '97), *Other Voices Other Rooms, Lonely Hearts, Alan and Naomi* and *A Matter of Degrees.* The cinematographer has also contributed sterling second-unit work to *A Simple Plan, The Horse Whisperer, Something to Talk About,* and two Academy Award winners for cinematography, *A River Runs Through It* and *Days of Heaven.*

While reading the script for *Wildflowers,* Ryan was immediately impressed by the understated quality of the young director's writing. "I thought it was a very interesting and subtle exploration of the consciousness of that time and its aftermath," he says. "Most everything I've seen in movies about that time overstate the importance of the drugs, sex and rock 'n' roll. Melissa's script took a tiny segment of the era — these three people and their relationships to each other — and looked at how heavily influenced they all were by that time. It was also about the changing aesthetic from the Sixties to the Eighties. A lot of good came out of the Sixties in terms of people's thinking opening up, but there was also an abandonment of responsibility. Things that may have seemed okay during that time, like having a child in a commune and then just taking off and leaving the child to be raised there, obviously had serious consequences."

Opposite: Sabine (Daryl Hannah) meditates on her life in a pastoral setting (actual film frame). Left: A teenager seeking direction, Cally (Clea DuVall) meets Sabine for the first time outside the City Lights bookstore in San Francisco's North Beach neighborhood (actual film frame). Filming at the location (below) demanded a documentary-style approach, since the production couldn't afford to shut down the famous intersection at Broadway and Columbus.

While Painter had noted Ryan's impressive ability to capture the beauty of natural environments, she didn't realize till later that she had stumbled upon a kindred spirit with firsthand knowledge of *Wildflowers'*

Flower Power

Wildflowers **is a distinctive coming-of-age story. Director Melissa Painter notes, "In my personal experience, relationships in which a young woman falls in love with an older woman in that 'I want to grow up to be like her' way have had much more impact." (Actual film frames.)**

distinct milieu. Ryan had moved to San Francisco in 1962, at the tail end of his short career on the national ski-racing circuit. An engineering major in college, Ryan was bitten by the photography bug, and began taking pictures around the city in his free time. He eventually enrolled in graduate film program at San Francisco State and resided in the city ("as a peripheral hippie," he says with a laugh) until 1974.

"I was aware of Paul's work, but I had no idea he had such a history with the place!" Painter exclaims. "It was incredibly helpful to have a cinematographer who had experienced the same time and place that Cally's parents in the film had. My personal experience was more from Cally's end, in the Eighties. The shoot was full of funny coincidences in that way. One day while talking to Paul, I was describing one of the houses we had gotten permission to shoot in, and he actually recognized it as a place where one of his friends had lived. He had actually stayed there many times!"

Like many low-budget independent films, the production was forced to endure many agonizing stops and starts in the financing stage. But Painter believes that the delays may actually have benefitted the finished film. "We were both cursed and blessed by the fact that *Wildflowers* took a long time to finance," she states. "We were blessed to have much more preproduction time than we ever could have afforded if it was the other way around. It was painful for everyone involved when the film got pushed back. But at the same time, the locations we got and the amount of time Paul and I spent talking about the movie were luxuries I never would have had otherwise."

As he began preproduction with Painter, Ryan was surprised at how little San Francisco had changed, on a purely cosmetic level, since he'd lived there. "I hadn't spent much time there recently, but it was easy to find places that hadn't really changed from the old days," he says. "For instance, the whole houseboat scene in Sausalito looks pretty much the same from the outside. And the kids living around there today even look like hippies, with tied-dyed clothes and so forth. The difference is that in the background are the latest $10,000 computers — the kids are contemporary on that level! But North Beach still looks the same as it did in the Sixties, as does the City Lights bookstore [where Cally first encounters Sabine in the story]. So those places remained resonant of the Sixties, which was a big help to me from the start."

With a still camera and Hi-8 camcorder in hand, Ryan traveled to all of the primary locations in the film, methodically documenting the visual possibilities afforded by each. In some cases, his prep work triggered shot ideas that Painter would later replicate in the finished film. "Fortunately, we had a guy on the film who had a fairly high-tech computer with a frame-grab device," Ryan reveals. "If I went out and shot some footage at a beach, we would block a scene with stand-ins. Then we could look at a frame from my Hi-8 video that night and say, 'Well, we could shoot from that rock over

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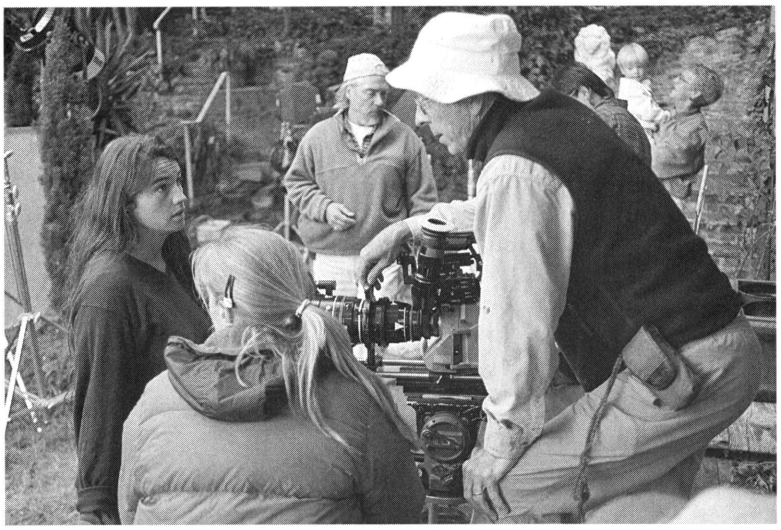


Right: Painter and Paul Ryan discuss a setup. The two filmmakers found that their respective experiences of living in San Francisco aided them in planning the modestly budgeted production. Bottom: Sabine and Cally's paths cross at several classic San Francisco locales (actual film frame).

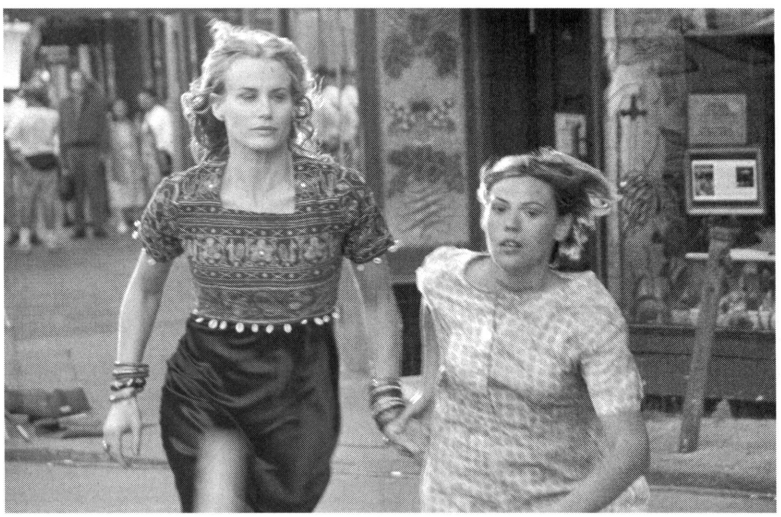
there with a 50mm lens.' It became a reality-based storyboard, with footage of a real place captured by a real camera and lens. Rather than running around on the shoot day trying to find a place to put the camera, we could just refer to our whole notebook of frame-grabs and still photos. It's a method that's being used a lot more on films. Stanley Kubrick once said, 'When you're designing a film, anything you can do with a Nikon you can also do with a Panaflex.' Now, of course, that idea has evolved to include video cameras."

Painter found her directorial responsibilities simplified by the preproduction footage. "I find storyboards to be completely impossible," she admits. "Because I can't draw, I can't use them as a resource for myself. But something as reality-based as photos and video frame-grabs is really helpful to me as a research tool. Paul would find compositions at locations that would perfectly capture what I was trying to articulate. There's a shot in the film of Cally rowing a boat with the silhouette of a mountain in the background. We basically went out and duplicated one of Paul's still photos for that scene. In addition, it's a great way to show everyone involved with the project — from the bond company to the art department — exactly what our intentions were, and what they could expect at a given location."

Even with all of Ryan and Painter's painstaking research, the production still encountered its fair share of location headaches during the tight 22-day shoot. The filmmakers was forced to descend upon the exterior of San Francisco's famous City Lights bookstore in guerrilla-like fashion, since the production couldn't afford to shut down the famous intersection of Broadway and Columbus. "That area of San Francisco is probably the section that's most desirable to filmmakers," Ryan comments, "and because it's been photographed a million times, the people there have no fascination with the film business. They don't necessarily need or want you there! A big feature could just buy out the block, but obviously we couldn't do that."

Thus, Ryan's skill with handheld cinematography (honed through years of documentary shooting) came into play, saving the production crucial setup time and lending a welcome sense of freedom and energy to the shots. "Broadway and Columbus is probably the busiest intersection in the city," the cinematographer states. "There was no place to put anything. The sidewalk is about as wide as a table, plus there's a bus stop right there! We couldn't even block the people who were waiting for the bus, let alone shoot in the street. We simply had to jump right in, get the scene between the arrivals of buses, then jump out again and hope that the light in the next take would somehow match. My San Francisco based crew, AC Lorna Leslie, gaffer Arthur Aravena and grip Sean Pritchard were very good at adapting to fast-changing situations."

On other occasions, the filmmakers purposefully shot handheld to lend an added grace and fluidity to what might have been a relatively inert dialogue scene. "'Handheld' is a scary word for a lot of film people," Ryan maintains. "They immediately



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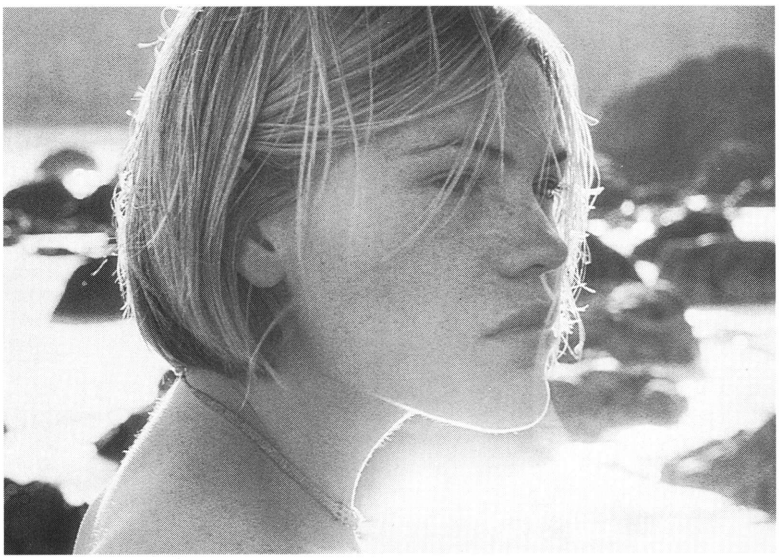


Right: Cally catches the light (actual film frame). Water was one of the main visual motifs in *Wildflowers*, with several scenes set on a houseboat. Because Painter wanted to see detail in the hot backgrounds, Ryan often used low-contrast Vision 320T to help carry the extremes in exposure. Bottom: Ryan meters a shot on actress Clea DuVall.

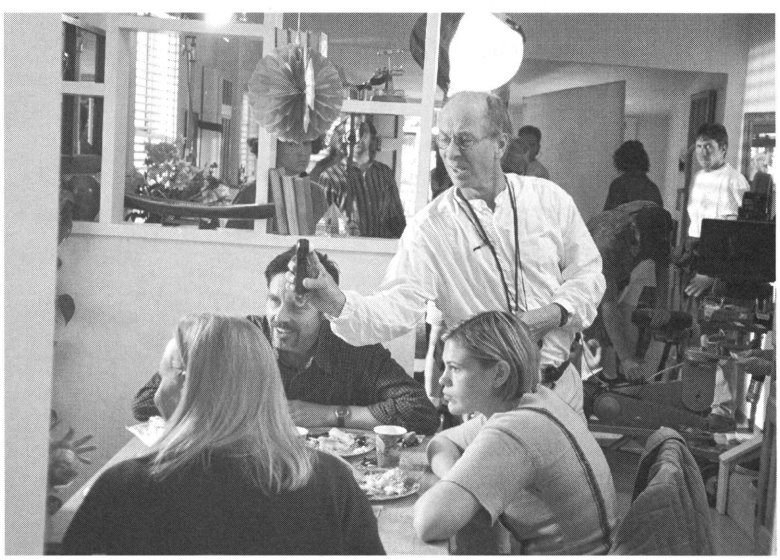
think of some wobbly early-Sixties documentary or *Breaking the Waves.* But you can do a scene handheld without people necessarily noticing that it's handheld. Plus, shooting handheld allows you to get things done a lot faster."

Ryan was faced with rapidly dwindling sunlight during one early evening shoot, but an extended dialogue scene between Cally and her father had yet to be captured. "We had about five minutes to get the shot," Ryan recalls with a chuckle. "It was a sequence in which Cally walks over to a barn in Marin County, where she finds her father with a girl. He and Cally then had to come out of the barn together and walk back to her truck, so I said, 'Why don't we just do it all handheld in one shot?' The fact that the actors were moving made it work. If the actors had just been standing there, it would have been possible but not as good — Clea [DuVall] ended up doing this great ad-lib where she took the dad's hat off and put it on herself. That scene is an example of working with the director to design a handheld shot that adds some dynamic energy to the story."

To ensure this type of flexibility throughout the shoot, Ryan employed a lightweight, versatile equipment package. "Instead of having an ancient Arri BL-1 that sits in the truck and sort of waits for the A-camera to break down," he explains, "I wanted my second camera to be the smallest, lightest handheld unit I could find. I wanted to have it on the set all the time, as if it were a Nikon hanging around my neck. While the A-camera was on a dolly or a gearhead, I wanted to be able to grab my second camera, scramble to the top of a rock and grab some quick shots.

"Our A-camera was the Moviecam Compact, but we had a Moviecam SuperLight on hand as our backup. It's almost as quiet as the Compact, it's perfectly adequate for dialogue and interiors, and it's really small and light. I had it on the set at all times, fitted with a Zeiss prime lens and ready to shoot. Any time we had to set up a dolly track or do some pre-lighting or rigging, I'd pick up the SL and grab shots with it, either handheld or with the support of a little sandbag. I argued really long and hard for that camera. Although it's a little more expensive than using an old BL-1 as a backup, it was really worth it. We'd get in these jams, and I'd just instinctively grab that camera. We ended up shooting more than half the movie with the SL."

For a striking scene in which Cally and her father drive down a country road at twilight, Ryan proved his dedication to Conrad Hall, ASC's famous comment, 'I like to *abuse* the film.' "Conrad is really one of my heroes," he asserts. "It was another situation where it was getting really late and I was just despairing because it was so dark. The camera was mounted on the hood of the truck, and we were driving down a very hilly road so we were going from three stops over with the sun right down the lens to three stops under in the dips in the road. We didn't have time to stop filming and find the road's 'sweet spot,' so we just had to keep on going and deal with whatever we encoun-



tered. I chose [the 500 ASA EXR 5298] as our high-speed stock since it digs into the shadows so well. Kodak changed the curve a bit with [the Vision 500T] 5279 so that the blacks go blacker and thicker, meaning you have to use more fill light. I anticipated that we would have uncontrolled situations where adding fill wouldn't be possible. The 98's capabilities really helped us because it was able to handle those extremes and contrast."

Due to the rollicking road and angle of the late-day sunlight, the resulting image is dramatically pierced by a lens flare. Painter describes, "It was one of those classic moments where everything felt right. The flare happened exactly when we wanted it to happen in the dialogue — as Cally's father is in a bit of a reverie — and the flare went away right when we didn't want it to be there anymore. You have to be open to those sort of possibilities. It was a situation where we said to ourselves, 'Are we going to do this or are we going to say we didn't get the scene?' And Paul always would say, 'We're going to do it.'"

Ryan found that Kodak's low-contrast Vision 320T 5277 stock was a boon to several scenes shot aboard the houseboat, which presented a tricky dichotomy of interior and exterior light levels. "Kodak claims that 77 renders 15 to 20 percent less contrast than the traditional stocks," Ryan says. "I talked a lot to [fellow cinematographer] Stephen Lighthill, who was using 77 all the time for the television series *Nash Bridges* [see *AC* Oct. '97]. He loves it because he's shooting a television series where he has to work fast, and can't always gel windows or use a lot of fill. The difference, of course, is that a television show goes direct to video, so it wasn't a perfect example of what we were going to do. Still, I ended up using 77 for the houseboat scenes, and it worked very well. We could still see what was going on outside

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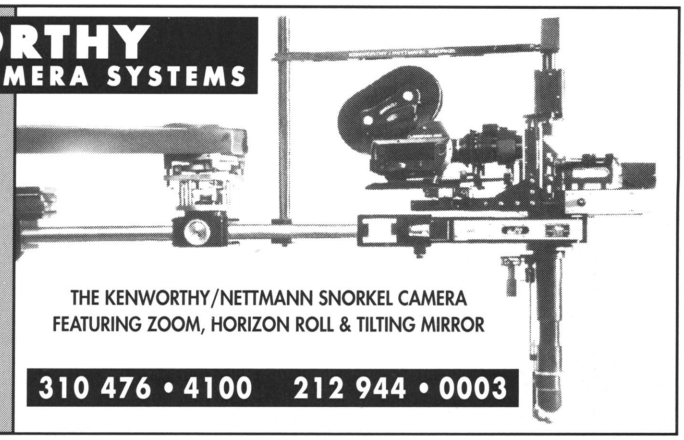

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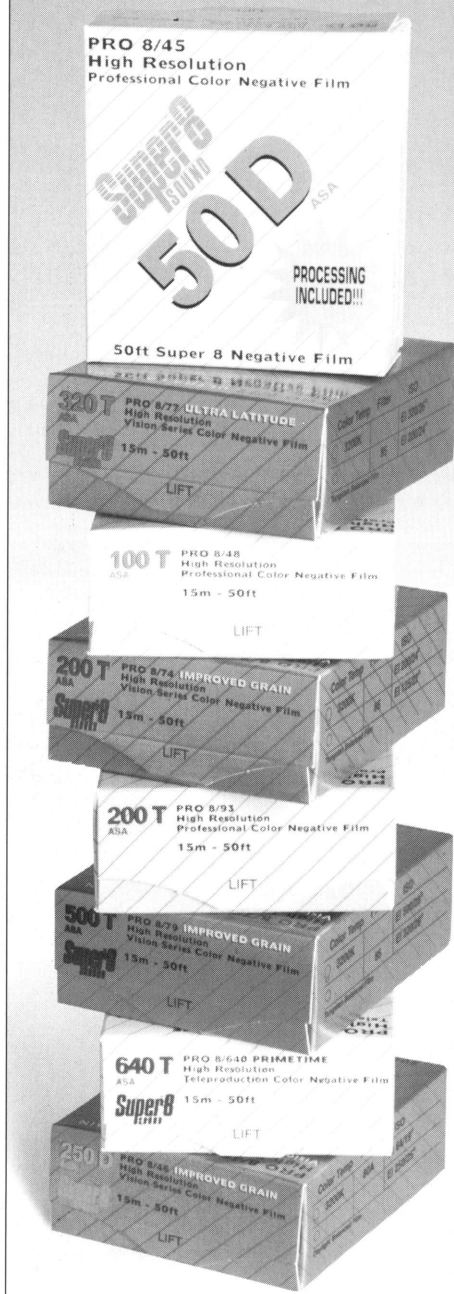

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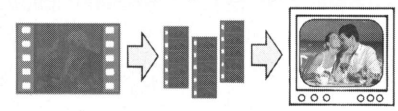

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Opposite: Cally appears as a flaxen-haired beauty. Commenting on his lighting for actress Daryl Hannah, Ryan details, "We wanted to keep Daryl's light high-key. We came up with the term 'alabaster light' to describe our lighting for her. It was a white, almost desaturated sort of high-key fashion look." This page, below: Ryan uses a white card to bounce some fill on the actress.

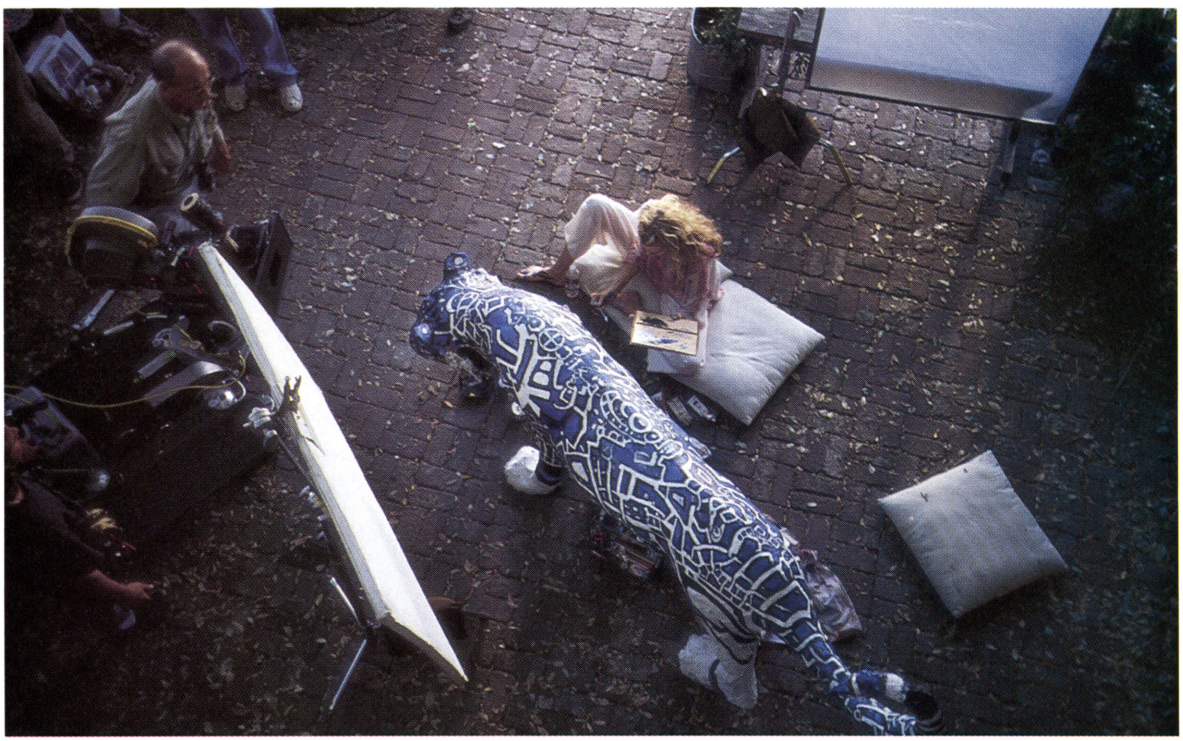
the houseboat without using much fill inside. Melissa wanted things to look hot outside anyway, so it was slightly blown out but not beyond the [printable exposure] spectrum."

Ryan's careful study of the give-and-take between the glare of the sun and the reflective ocean allowed him to lend a shimmering quality to a dialogue scene between Cally and her father on the houseboat. "When we were scouting, we noticed the sun hitting the water and making reflections back in the boat," Ryan recalls. "Obviously, you can't count on that happening during the shoot, so we experimented with a couple of methods to replicate the effect. We initially aimed one of our lights into some loose Mylar mounted on a frame, but we found that the effect was better if we bounced real sunlight off the Mylar. We'd just jiggle the frame a little bit to imitate the movement [of the watery reflection]. The challenge was in not getting *too much* movement. I remember having to yell 'Less, less!' when I was looking through the camera, because, in the end, it was still a dialogue scene."

The effect cleverly enhances a rather straightforward scene, and also works as a visual metaphor for one of the film's themes. "Water was one of the motifs in the movie," Painter points out. "We were always talking about how the locations were going to transform throughout the film. In the design of the film, the deeper Cally gets into Sabine's life, the more water seems to invade the houseboat. We wanted to make the landscape a character in the film."

Ryan, with Painter's enthusiastic encouragement, didn't shy away from using unusual methods to add visual exclamation points to certain key moments in the film. In one day-for-night confrontation between Cally and Sabine — during a turning point in their relationship — the forest clearing where the characters are standing has an odd, greenish color cast. "It's meant to be early evening, because the previous scene, in which Daryl's character leaves her house, clearly occurs at twilight," Ryan details. "We didn't have enough time to find the perfect location, so we had to find a place that was near one of our major locations, and grab those shots quickly after lunch. It wasn't the easiest scene in terms of the light, because the grove was really harsh and contrasty. Psychologically, it's a very extreme moment in the film when Sabine is having a catharsis, so we wanted the scene to look unusual in some way. We ended up working with our timer, Chris Reagan at CFI, to play around with the traditional day-for-night look and arrive at this strange green.

"CFI has a process called 'proof-printing,' where you can sit down with the timer and look at still frames from each scene," Ryan continues. "The idea is to get a jump-start on the timing of the actual print. The process gets a bad rap because people say, 'It doesn't have anything to do with how the real scene will look.' And to some degree, it doesn't. You can't say to the producer, 'Don't worry, if we do this proof-print process, our first answer print will be perfect.' There are still nuances that will come out differently in a print.



"However, Chris Reagan was willing to talk to us for hours in a proof-print session. I would bring in gel filters and say to him, 'What if we were to add this yellow, this green, et cetera.' The process allows you to spend a lot more time discussing the nuances of colors and density in a specific scene. Timers sometimes get caught in this trap of not wanting to stray too far from the middle-ground. I told Chris, 'Go to the extreme — I'd rather have you go too far, too dark, too light, too green or too whatever, and then come back.' If the timer doesn't do that, you can have three answer prints and still not be sure if you've gone far enough. The scene in question evolved because we were able to push it until it got to be strange, which we wanted. At various points in the film, Melissa would say, 'God, is this film going to be strange enough?'"

For the film's penultimate confrontation between Cally and Sabine, the filmmakers found a fitting location: an actual Sixties-era

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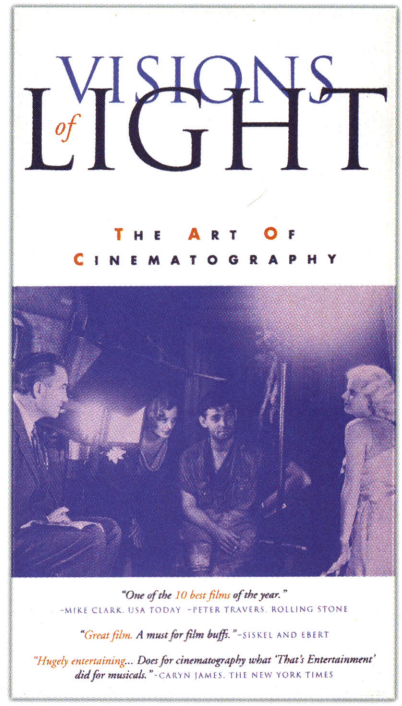

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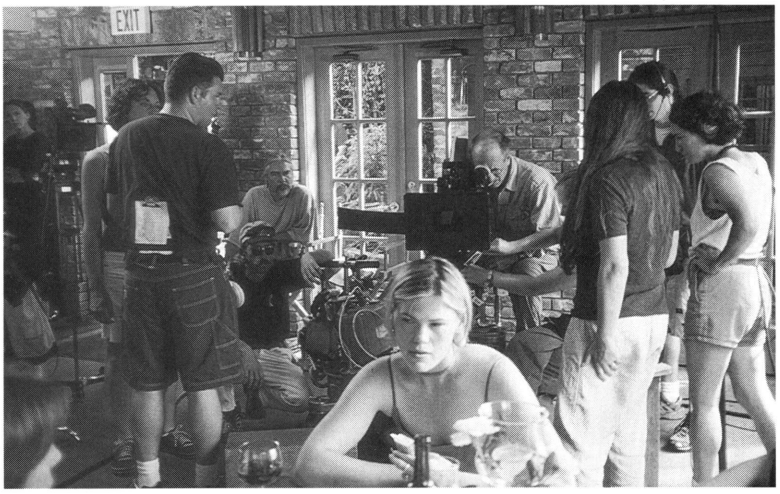

Behind the camera, Ryan angles in for an over-the-shoulder shot of actress Clea DuVall.

commune in West Marin. Actresses Clea DuVall and Daryl Hannah were framed around the window of a shed, and Ryan utilized the unpredictable late-afternoon sun flooding in behind them by letting the background blow out. "The afternoon light was coming through eucalyptus trees, causing this wonderful fluttering effect which I didn't want to take away," he relates. "We could have put up large silks, but that would have taken a huge amount of time with our very small crew and ruined the effect of the sunlight. The natural light would be beautiful on Clea, but 15 minutes later the sun would go behind a tree and leave her in shade.

"It became a question of how to re-create what was already there. I used two 4K Pars coming down in the same direction as the sunlight, because we obviously couldn't count on the sunlight staying in the same place. I allowed the leaves behind the actresses in the background to blow out. The [50 ASA daylight-balanced EXR 5245] I was using was amazing — it held onto just enough highlights and textures in the leaves. We used some Hampshire Frost or Opal on the lights, but no more than that because the light was already going through the old and dirty windows of the shed."

Throughout the shoot, Ryan tried to balance his aesthetic approach to the actresses with a consideration of the emotions their characters experienced in particular scenes. "Daryl has really beautiful, deep-set eyes with a striking angular face, while Clea's face is more round,"

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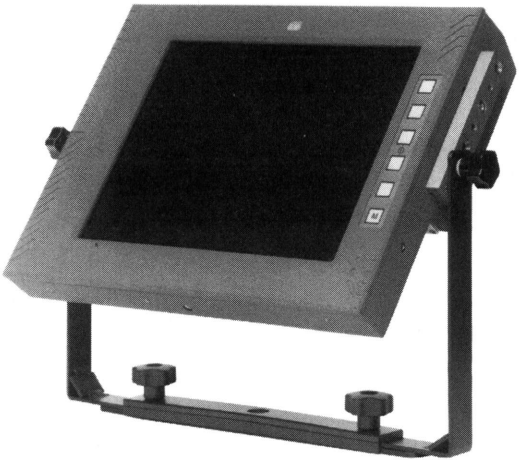

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Ryan says. "We wanted to keep Daryl's light high-key. We came up with the term 'alabaster light' to describe our lighting for her. It was a white, almost desaturated sort of high-key fashion look. In one scene where Clea is brushing Sabine's hair in the house, we used very harsh light because it fit that point in the film psychologically. Even in the scene in the shed, the lighting was a little harder on Daryl than it normally would be, because it's an agonizing scene for her character."

Painter says it was precisely this sensitivity to the script that made her collaboration with Ryan such a satisfying one. "Paul would rather talk about the emotional content of a scene than 'Where can we put a crane shot?'" the director says. "I also really liked the way he relies on intuition — that's the way I work, and it's also what the film is about! His energy and instincts are connected to everything I celebrate about the Sixties. Some cinematographers I've worked with have operated out of fear. There is so much pressure on them, and I know because I've shot before. The director of photography is the center point of the entire project — either there's going to be an image on the film or there's not, and it's a tremendous weight to bear. The cinematographers who are usually available to shoot a low-budget film have the whole weight of their career resting on your movie, and that's not necessarily a good thing for your film. Paul talks about using instincts, but he also has years of experience and consequently enough faith in himself to take risks. There are other cinematographers who would say, 'I can't shoot this,' because they'd be afraid a shot would come out badly and it would reflect negatively on them. I knew I had to work with someone who was never going to do that."

For his part, Ryan points out the importance of those moments on a shoot when the motion picture camera isn't in hand, or even necessarily in the vicinity. "When you're working on a film that's so personal to the director, just hanging out with her and talking to her about life in general somehow informs your unconscious," he explains. "Then when you *are* ready to make creative decisions, you know what the real emotional origins of the story are. When the sun is going down and it's the fourteenth hour of filming, you can only go on those instincts and intuitions that have been built up by talking to the director over beers some night at a pasta place in Marin. It's not a rational process at that point. It's about gut-level decisions based on the experience of someone involved with the story — not just on *your own* gut feelings based on the last film you made." ■

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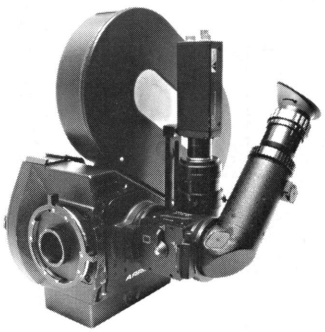

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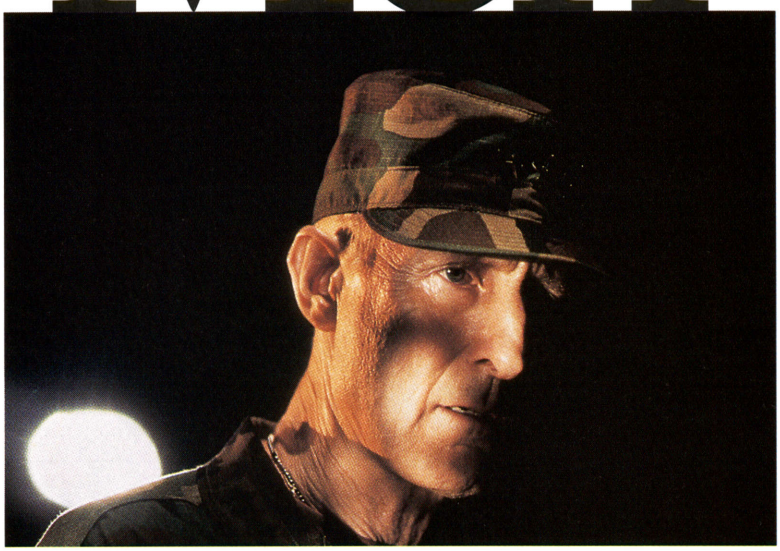
A Few Bad Men



Director Simon West and cinematographer Peter Menzies Jr., ACS team up to uncover dark military secrets in *The General's Daughter.*

by Jay Holben

Photography by Richard Foreman

After the success of his feature directorial debut, the action-adventure yarn *Con Air* (see *AC* June '97), veteran commercial director Simon West turned to mystery and intrigue for his second project. Adapted by screenwriters William Goldman and Chris Bertolini, Nelson DeMille's seventh novel, *The General's Daughter,* centers on warrant officer Paul Brenner (John Travolta). A top investigator from the Army's Criminal Investigation Division, Brenner is assigned to look into the brutal murder of Captain Elizabeth Campbell (Leslie Stefanson), the daughter of General Joseph Campbell (James Cromwell), after her body is found in the middle of an Army training field. Working closely with fellow CID veteran Sara Sunhill (Madeleine Stowe), Brenner soon discovers a scandal of immense proportions.

Asked how he selected Australian director of photography Peter Menzies Jr., ACS to shoot *The General's Daughter,* West recalls, "When I started getting the team together, I looked at a lot of cinematographers' work. I was watching many films and I came across [the 1994 remake of] *The Getaway,* which Peter had shot. I remembered working with him on a commercial a few years back, and I began looking at other films he had done since then. Each one had a very particular but consistent look, which I liked."

Menzies and West had formed their initial bond during an extraordinary turn of events that occurred immediately after the 1994 Northridge earthquake, which devastated large portions of Los Angeles. As the tremors began to rock the city, West was just starting work on a Ford commercial. The director recalls, "The earthquake happened a Monday morning, and we all thought that the job would be canceled, but when the phones were working again on Tuesday morning, we found out that it wasn't! Ford urgently needed the spot, so we went right to work."

Explains Menzies, "I happened to be in Los Angeles at the same time. The gentleman who was originally hired to shoot the commercial had his house totaled by the earthquake. Through a mutual friend, Simon and I were introduced, and I got the job."

One could say that cinematography runs in Menzies' very genes. He virtually grew up in a camera department Down Under, and was pretty much born into an apprenticeship program. "My father was a cinematographer, and I started out as an assistant for him on school holidays," he recalls. "Working on commercials, I got to travel a lot. By the age of 18, I had been to Paris and I had stayed in London for a couple of months. I got hooked on those types of experiences, and for a long time I thought that I would be a career assistant."

After securing a job with a commercial production company as a camera assistant/assistant editor,

Photos courtesy of Paramount.

Menzies began to flesh out his knowledge base through hands-on experience, but his notion of embarking upon a long career as a camera assistant came to an end during the 1983 America's Cup race in Newport, Rhode Island. While working on a documentary about the famed boating event, Menzies got the opportunity to go behind the lens and shoot. "I just got the bug," he confesses. "From that moment on, I worked hard to move up the ladder. I slowly graduated to operating, shooting as often as I could, and finally broke into commercials for a few years." Menzies' commercial reel later caught the attention of director Roger Donaldson, who was assembling a team to shoot the thriller *White Sands*. "They were striving for a slick commercial look, and after seeing my reel, they gave me the biggest break of all — my first feature."

After filming the subsequent features *Posse*, *Die Hard: With a Vengeance*, *A Time to Kill* (*AC* Aug. '96) and *Hard Rain* (*AC* Jan. '98), Menzies set out to bring *The General's Daughter* to life.

Shores of darkness

Although the screenplay for *General's Daughter* was originally set on a fictitious Army base somewhere in middle America, West decided to relocate the film to the deep South's moss-laden marshes. "The story is about betrayal, intrigue and old-fashioned codes of honor, so it seemed to me that the South would serve perfectly — there is such a sense of deep-rooted tradition down there," explains West. "I wanted to capture all of the old architecture, so that in every shot you are constantly being reminded of those traditions and codes."

He also rewrote a significant number of scenes so they would take place under the cover of night. "It's a bit of a cheat, because the murder is committed and solved within 36 hours," West admits, "but in the film, the nights are much longer than the days. I just wanted to get as much darkness in as many of the scenes as possible. It's more creepy and mysterious, especially when you throw in all that the South has to offer — trees dripping with Spanish moss, and oppressive, muggy, humid nights with bugs and frogs making all sorts of noises. It's very atmospheric and spooky, and I wanted to get as much of that into the photography as possible."

To give his creative crew a point of reference for the film's moody visuals, West dubbed the ambience "Southern Gothic." He notes, "There was very little discussion with Peter, because he clicked straight away into my ideas. He shares the same interest in photography as I do, in that we both love dark imagery. He's not one to flood light into every corner of the frame. I was very keen for this movie to have a lush look. I wanted every frame to stand alone as a painting, but what I never expected was that Peter would do it so quickly — he can light very quickly and imaginatively. I don't know whether it's a technique that he's learned over time or if it's just pure instinct, but I was able to shoot twice as much as I probably deserved. I kept saying, 'Are you sure we're not compromising the look of this?' and he would say 'No, it looks fine.' Then we'd get into dailies the next day and it would be *beautiful*."

Attests Menzies, "Simon is very tuned into what he wants photographically. It was great to have a director who fought so many of the battles that I normally would have to fight with the studio. Simon just walks into the room and says, 'Okay, how dark are you going to paint these walls?' or 'We need more windows' — all of the things that cinematographers usually have to struggle over. If the director does it for you straight away, it's amazing.

"We took a moody visual approach that combined an in-your-face Steadicam style with classic dollies and cranes," he continues. "There is so much information coming across on the screen in the form of dialogue — often spoken by John Travolta and Madeline Stowe in

Opposite: General Joseph Campbell (James Cromwell) lurks in the shadows. Above: A wider view of the close-up being shot. Note the sidelight broken with foliage netting. Darkness was a key compositional component for cameraman Peter Menzies Jr., ACS (below, in cap) throughout the shoot.

A Few Bad Men

Above: The film's "Southern Gothic" aesthetic called for extensive fog effects while shooting on the bayou. To create added depth without lighting huge expanses, Menzies staggered fixtures in the background, allowing the fog to carry the illumination. Right: Extensive underwater work for a firefight sequence was done in Paramount Pictures' B-Tank, which doubles as a studio parking lot when it's not full of water. Because of restrictions in the production's schedule, the B-tank sequences had to be shot day-for-night. This created a rather foreboding task for key grip Alan Rawlins, who had to devise a tenting system that would completely cover the space.

a room, or in a car — that we decided to really mix things up to give Simon a lot of choices in the cutting room. I love using Steadicam, because it tends to free up the actors and the director enormously. Robert Presley has been my Steadicam operator on five films now, and we have a great, brotherly relationship."

The art of 'Scope

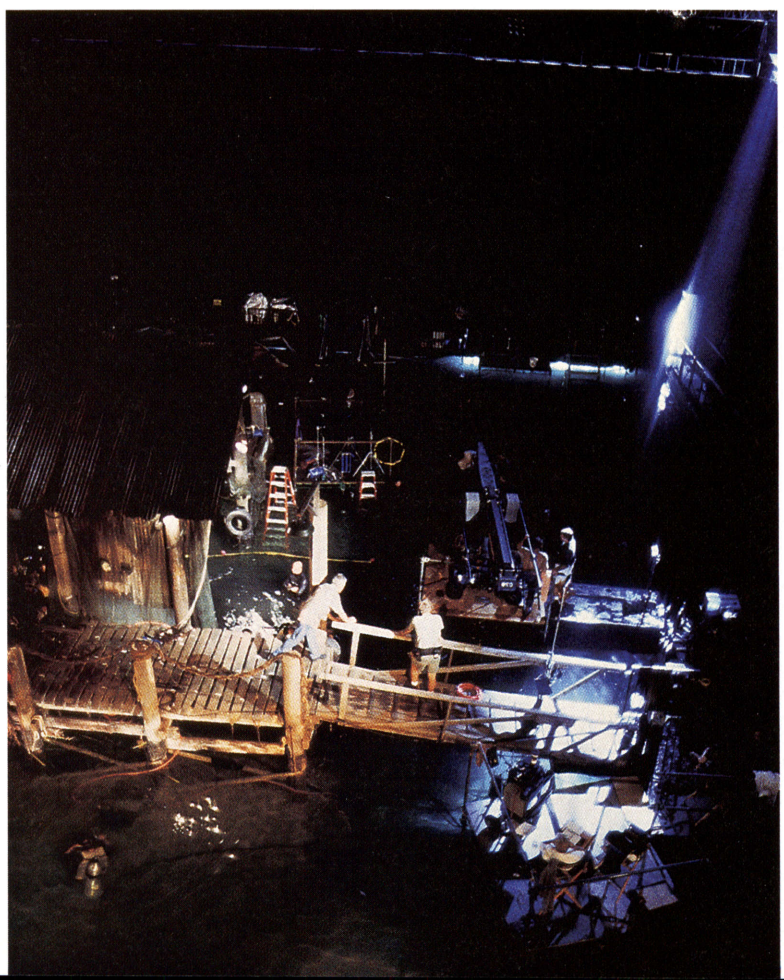
West and Menzies elected to shoot *General's Daughter* in anamorphic, partially due to one of the format's presumed drawbacks. "Some people think of lens flares as a photographic fault, but we used them as a motif," maintains West. "There are a lot of shots in *General's Daughter* that have huge flares running through them. I love the way that light bounces around in anamorphic lenses. When a point of light is out of focus, you get these wonderful soft oval blobs in the background, and when it's sharp, you can get these amazing long flares running through the frame. If someone walks in front of the light, the flare disappears and then pops back on again. It's very interesting to me to watch that kind of imagery — it's very real and intense."

"All of the films I've shot have either been anamorphic or Super 35," submits Menzies. "Simon and I both love the widescreen format. I've found that over-the-shoulder two-shots are much easier to achieve and control — framing-wise — in 2.35:1 rather than in 1.85:1, especially in a film with so much information to get across through dialogue. In 1.85 you either get too much headroom or air on the side. There's nothing like an over-the-shoulder shot in anamorphic — it's a great format for keeping two characters involved in a scene."

Menzies stuck with his favorite camera gear from Panavision. "They offer the most flexible package you can get, and you can put Panavision cameras anywhere and they never stop. We also used the older C-Series anamorphic lenses so we could use the same set for everything — Steadicam, handheld, or stage work. I prefer to use the same set of lenses as opposed to mixing and matching." Menzies utilized two Platinum packages, along with a lightweight Panaflex for Steadicam shots and a Panavised Arriflex-35 III for high-speed work.

In terms of film stocks, the cinematographer mainly used Eastman Kodak's Vision 500T 5279 and EXR 5248, rating them at 500 and 100 ISO, respectively. However, Kodak's new Vision 800T 5289 emulsion was drafted for a special mission. "For some key flashback sequences toward the end of the film, Simon and I agreed to do some shooting at 40 and 60 fps," Menzies notes.

As luck would have it, these sequences took place at the MOUT (Military Operations in Urban Terrain) site, a mock town built exclusively for Army training. It took gaffer Rafael Sanchez and his crew two full weeks to pre-rig the location. Instead of taking the time to relight these sequences for high-speed photography, Menzies employed the 5289 to gain the extra two-thirds of a stop needed to shoot at 40 fps. "The stock had just come out at that time, but it was pretty fantastic," he attests. "It afforded us the ability to shoot 40 fps at night, and on some of the faster lenses we could even get away with shooting at 60 fps without needing



more light. I love it when highlights in night scenes start going really out of focus — they take on some great shapes. Unfortunately for the camera assistant, I therefore shoot at T2.8 quite a lot, especially at night.

"We went straight with the processing," he continues. "We did talk about doing some ENR work on the show prints, but with the new Kodak Vision print stock, you don't need to do ENR. It's a beautiful stock with clean blacks and extraordinary color separation."

Admits West, "We had a bit of concern toward the end of the show because the labs had changed over to the Vision print stock. We hadn't really shot with the Vision stock in mind, because Kodak was supposed to have kept enough of the old stock [5386] around to do all of our prints on, but they didn't. We shot the film so contrasty to begin with that I was afraid the whole film was going to disappear if we went to a *more* contrasty print stock! In the end, though, it actually worked out great, and all of the prints look fantastic."

Seeking to save production time, Menzies altered his basic lighting approach while shooting *The General's Daughter*, opting to use smaller sources than usual. "For the most part, I like to use large sources as far away as I can to give everyone as much flexibility as possible," the cinematographer explains, "but on this film, I often found myself interlocking 2K Zips to use as keys. Madeline [Stowe] and John [Travolta] handled the 2K soft light very well."

"We would often use multiple egg crates on each 2K Zip, one crate on top of the other to make a more controlled source," says gaffer Rafael Sanchez, who teamed up with Menzies for the first time on *General's Daughter*. "That configuration or a Chimera softbox would most often be our key source. We also played with some cosmetic gels from Gam Color. After settling on Warm

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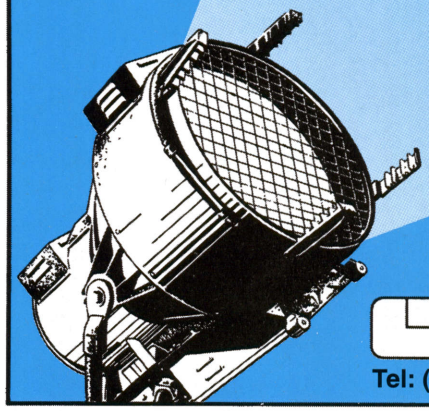

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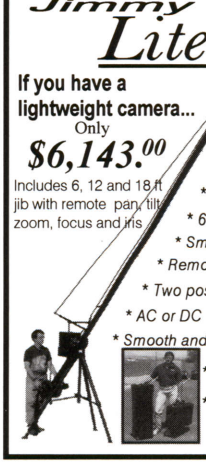

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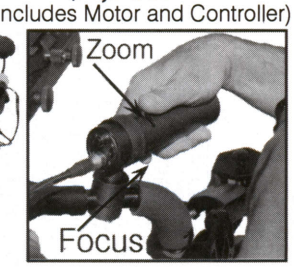

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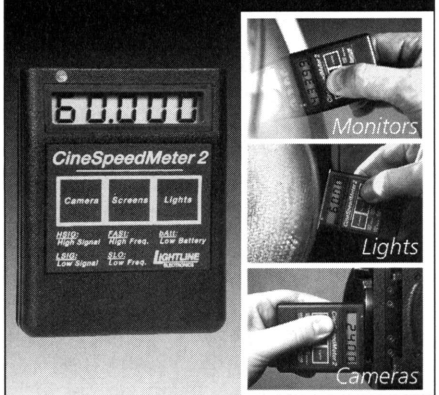

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Hint [NCW 3], which seemed to really help everyone's skin tones, we used that gel on all of our key lights."

Ill met by moonlight

Due to the film's considerable number of night scenes, a major consideration was how to define the night look. Both Menzies and West chose to forsake "blue" moonlight for a more practical approach. "I wanted every scene to have that oppressive feeling of muggy Southern heat," details West, "and I thought that any cool colored light would kill the feeling. As a result, we worked in warm tones. We chose locations that we would paint in darker colors like reds, ambers and oranges, and we stuck to Peter's main night plan, in which moonlight never came down from above. All of the night sequences were lit as if the illumination being generated purely by practical sources on the ground."

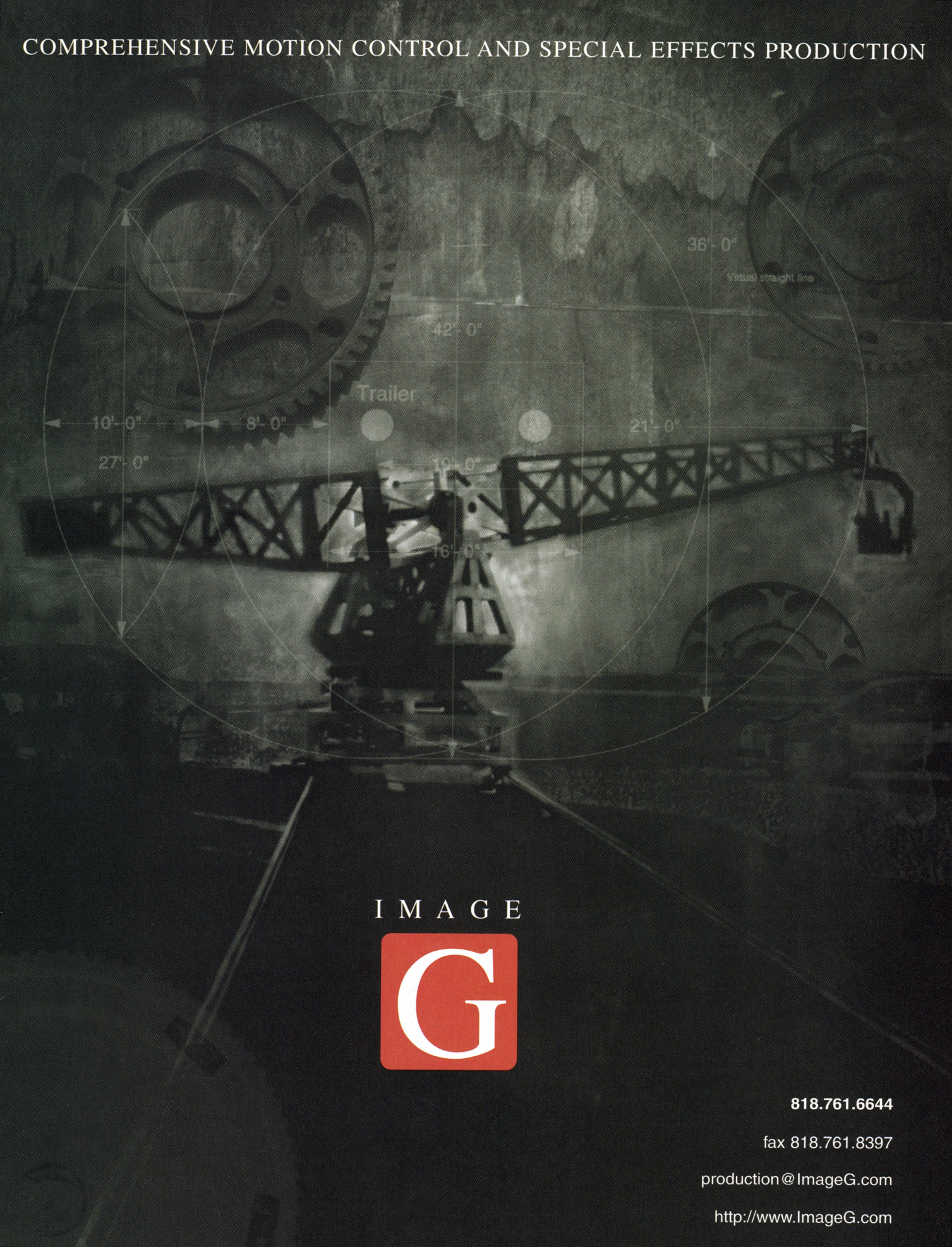
"In keeping with Simon's warm look," adds Menzies, "I went with a more sodium-vapor approach for all of the night sequences. We colored all of our lights to have that yellowish sodium feel. [Given the widescreen frame] a lot of the lights on the ground were going to end up in the frame. Obviously, they were not real streetlights, but film lights placed off in the distance and simply gelled to look sodium colored. Simon loved that idea, and once we defocused them, they became these wonderful background elements that resembled anything — other buildings, streetlights. They created fantastic visual expanse without us having to light everything with Condors. Speed was the other added benefit. By keeping everything out of the air, and not minding that lamps were in the shot, we were able to move much more quickly and cover a lot more ground in a short period of time.

"We went pretty saturated with our colors," he adds. "Sometimes I'd put three or four layers of full CTS on a lamp so it would go into a really weird orange-red spectrum that was close to sodium-vapor in color. As the film went on, we added more color as we got braver about the look, always keeping the actor's skin tones around 2400°K so that they maintained that nice warm look.

"I love mixing color temperatures. For the last couple of years, the boys have made fun of me for not using any two lights of the same color. When you do walk down the street in real life, though, nothing is perfect — there are weird fabulous colors all around you. In my opinion, using something other than white light all the time just makes a scene more realistic. We used a lot of theatrical colors, too. I haven't used traditional CTO for quite a while, since I prefer to use CTS. It drops the color temperature down another 400°K and has a bit more yellow in it than orange."

Utilizing light sources in the frame became one of the film's constant motifs, and served to create great depth with a minimal amount of effort. "In the case of the MOUT site, we were in the middle of a swamp with a set that was built to resemble an entire training town," offers Sanchez. "We had to find a way to show the depth of the location without the classic 'moonlight' source. We had guys put out cable stretching several hundred yards away from the main set in all directions, and we'd put lamps out there — nine-lights, Dinos and single Mole Pars. Then we would put different gels on them, depending on where they fell into frame and the type of color contrast Peter wanted to see. Finally, we would add a layer of smoke between the lamps and the set — that worked very well and created amazing depth."

"Peter is a master at using smoke," marvels West. "Because we were doing a lot of night shooting in wide-open spaces, the light obviously only travels so far. Beyond that it all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just goes to black, which can make for a very boring frame, but Peter had this incredible system of smoke machines and miles of plastic pipes running all around with little tiny holes. He would send smoke down them, and it would slowly leak out over a wide area, creating a very moody mist off in the distance."

Details Menzies, "I was using the fog as separation to reduce contrast in the background, and to add depth. With stray sources placed way off in the distance, once the smoke got between them and the camera, it created this whole atmosphere that extended the set far beyond the foreground.

"The special effects team had these smoke tubes made out of visqueen [a material similar to that used for garbage bags]. They were about a foot in diameter, and the crew would lay them all over the place. They'd put one little smoker between every couple of hundred yards, so we could run a mile of smoke very easily. If we wanted more smoke, we could just cut more holes in the tubes, and if we wanted less smoke, we could just patch them up. It was great for the rough terrain as well; because the tubes were flexible, we could just run them out anywhere. We used them a lot around the water edges in Savannah and around Brenner's houseboat, which is the setting for a major gun battle at the beginning of the film."

We're gonna need a bigger boat

In this action-packed opening sequence, Brenner thwarts his foes after a vigorous firefight around his houseboat. Exteriors for this scene were shot on Tybee Island, just off the coast of Georgia. "Anytime you're working on or near water, it's a nightmare," concedes Menzies. To offer West as much flexibility as possible during these sequences, he employed several boats rigged with six Par lamps and a generator. They were positioned strategically throughout the water surrounding the set. "If Simon wanted to get a quick reverse, or move to a different shot, we'd just move the boats around and put a layer of fog in front of them."

A foreboding lighthouse situated in the background of the scene continually sweeps a bright beam through the scene's hail of bullets. West found the perfect lighthouse on Tybee Island, but it was several miles away from the shooting site. Instead of moving the set to the lighthouse, Menzies' crew simulated the lighthouse beam at the shooting location, while the structure was later rebuilt as a digital model and composited into the scene. "Through Xenotech, we got a 7K Xenon lamp with a computerized rotating mirror to

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create that lighthouse beam," explains Sanchez. "We put it on a 120' Condor arm about 300 to 400' away from the set and just let it go. Xenotech sent out an operator who could control the speed of the rotation from the ground so that we could synchronize the beam with specific points of the scene."

Unfortunately, poor water clarity and tidal changes prevented the filmmakers from doing extensive underwater work on location in Savannah, so the entire set had to be re-created in Hollywood within Paramount Pictures' famous B-Tank, which doubles as a parking lot when it's not full of water. Because of restrictions in the production's schedule, the B-tank sequences had to be shot during daylight hours. This created a rather foreboding task for key grip Alan Rawlins, who had to devise a tenting system that would completely cover the space. Rawlins details, "The tent wound up being 106' square by 50' high, and it included a full greenbed system around the inside edge up at the very top of the tent, as well as walkways and accessways."

To erect the massive covering, Rawlins employed rigging grip Bob Leitelt and the Los Angeles-based company ShowRig. The main structure was built in three days, incorporating a 106'-square Griffolyn that was custom-made at Paramount. To re-create the lighthouse-beam effect, Sanchez stepped down from the 7K Xenon to a 4K with a motorized mirror that could be adjusted with a variac. Sanchez's crew also surrounded the reconstructed set with dimmer-controlled Maxi-Brutes to quickly provide backlight for any camera angle. Sanchez adds, "For the underwater shots done there, we used underwater Kino Flos and watertight Pars. We also had Mole Pars up above water to push some light through the surface."

Though the *General's Daughter* shoot was fraught with logistical difficulties — as well as the challenge of a unique visual style that sometimes went against the grain of traditional cinematographic methods — Menzies found that the experience greatly contributed to his ongoing artistic evolution. "I try not to approach a project with too many preconceived ideas," he concludes. "At the start of a show, I just go through the locations, build up a rapport with the director and production designer, and start to get a feel for what they have in mind. Until I see what the rest of the creative team is thinking about, I try to keep a pretty open mind. I also like to do something different each time. I've done color-saturated imagery for awhile, and now I'm ready for the next challenge." ■

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Hip Cinema

Celebrating its fifth year, the Los Angeles Independent Film Festival continues to emerge as an exciting showcase for non-studio visionaries.

by Andrew O. Thompson, David E. Williams and Holly Willis

Back in 1994, the Los Angeles Independent Film Festival (LAIFF) was nothing more than an amorphous idea that future founder/director Robert Faust mentioned to Sundance Festival programmer Robert Hawk over an early-morning pancake breakfast. Today, however, the American independent film scene has a place to call home, within viewing distance of the Hollywood sign. Running from April 15-20, this year's LAIFF commenced with *Entropy*, Phil Joanou's tale of a much-persecuted, first-time studio director, and closed with George Hickenlooper's *The Big Brass Ring*, a timely political drama based on an unproduced Orson Welles script. As a further testament to LAIFF's grass-roots vibe, those taking in the event's 27 features and 32 shorts could network in the festival's community center, located in the lobby of the Directors Guild of America.

The festival included a music video showcase, informative sessions on production, distribution and financing, a craft series (surveys of directing, writing, acting and casting), and Kodak's Close-Up cinematography forums — presented by John Toll, ASC (*A Thin Red Line*) and Stephen Katz (*Gods and Monsters*). The festival also featured retrospective screenings of several landmark indie films — namely, *Coming Apart* (1969), *Opening Night* (1970), *River's Edge* (1987) and *The Waterdance* (1991) — each of which was followed by a Q & A period with filmmakers and actors.

Of the approximately 15 movies viewed by *AC*'s festival crew, the following pictures were singled out for their frugal finesse.

— Andrew O. Thompson

LAIFF Audience Award Winners

Best Feature Film:
Pop and Me — directed by Chris Roe and produced by Richard Roe and Chris Roe.

Best Director:
Ed Radtke, *The Dream Catcher.*

Best Writer:
Jaffe Cohen and Chris Livingston, *Hit and Runway.*

Best Short:
Bingo, directed by Chris Landreth.

Indie Supporter Award:
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Better Living Through Circuitry
Director: Jon Reiss
Directors of Photography: Jon Reiss, Byron Shah, John Priebe, Joe Plonskey and Lee Abbot.

The feature-length documentary *Better Living Through Circuitry* examines the international electronic dance music community and its thriving subculture. Interviews trace such innovators as Moby, Lords of

Better Living Through Circuitry images courtesy of Jon Reiss and Cleopatra Films.

Acid, The Crystal Method, Roni Size, Electric Skychurch, D.J. Spooky and D.J. Keoki, as well as graphic designers, promoters and the music's intrepid fans, who sometimes travel hundreds of miles to attend clandestine all-night rave concerts held in remote locations. Key themes include empowerment through technology, the DIY (do-it-yourself) ethic, and the flowering of a new spirituality embracing transcendence through sound and rhythm.

Director Jon Reiss recently completed his first 35mm narrative feature, *Cleopatra's Second Husband* (see Production Slate, *AC* Sept. '98), which screened at the 1998 LAIFF. His other credits include a series of documentaries (shot on video) about the San Francisco performance-art group Survival Research Laboratories, and numerous music videos for such artists as The Black Crowes, Diamanda Galas and Nine Inch Nails.

Reiss began shooting *Better Living* in Miami while attending the 1997 Winter Music Conference, a major seminar for electronic music. "I went to my first 'rave' event with [producer Brian McNelis]. We saw the band Rabbit in the Moon, and we really fell in love with the experience," Reiss recalls. "At one point, it was 6 a.m. and I couldn't believe how much energy I had, which was a result of the music — it was unlike anything I had felt before. What's interesting is that when I started interviewing people about their first experiences at a show, the recurring theme was the feeling of being energized and really wanting to become a part of the scene."

Better Living documents events taking place in New York, San Francisco, and outlying regions of the Los Angeles area, including Indio, Salton Sea, San Bernardino and various other desert locales. "People find a positive sense of community within the rave culture," notes the director, who began his filmmaking career in

the early Eighties by taping San Francisco punk rock concerts for Target Video. "What's interesting is that there are echoes of the attitudes I found within the punk scene, which I didn't expect. The rave scene is often compared to disco or the Sixties, but a stronger comparison can be made to punk rock. We quickly found that out in the interviews, and the film

illustrates the same DIY feeling that drove the punk scene."

Better Living was shot with Sony's VX-1000 compact digital video camera and later blown up to 35mm for theatrical presentation. The camera "worked without a hitch during almost two years of shooting," Reiss attests. "Now, of course, the Firewire editing capability is

improved, which lets you take the time-code information directly out of the camera. Instead of doing that, we had to transfer all of our footage to DigiBeta — and some BetaSP — for editing. We ended up doing so many transfers that Brian bought a BetaSP deck."

Reiss attests that *Better Living* "would have been impossible to make if it wasn't for digital video. I'm a film person from way back, and I originally thought, 'Let's shoot film,' but it quickly became apparent that we couldn't do that. Digital video allowed us to take a camera into a location in a backpack and immediately start shooting; I often shot by myself or with one other person. It was great if I had somebody else to hold the light! Because of the compact size of the camera, we could just walk into an event and start shooting, which was very liberating as a filmmaker. That was one of the overriding sensations that I've taken from the experience of making this film.

"You can shoot in 16mm by yourself, but it's very cumbersome," he notes. "Super 8 is less cumbersome physically, but it also has limitations — like 2½-minute loads. With both of those formats, you need many more accoutrements to shoot than you need with DV. The VX-1000 is amazing in low-light situations — you don't need very much supplemental lighting at all. Aside from the economic considerations, this production approach also seemed to fit our subject matter, which documents how digital technology has made music-making more democratic."

Several other cameramen — including Byron Shah, John Priebe, Joe Plonskey and Lee Abbot — helped Reiss shoot *Better Living*. Each of them joined him at different locations for one or two interviews or concerts. Multiple cameras were used for a number of events, with Reiss himself on the other unit.

Opposite: Ravers cut loose at clandestine all-night concerts in *Better Living Through Circuitry*, a feature-length documentary shot with a Sony VX-1000 DV camera and then transferred to 35mm film for theatrical exhibition. The film offers extensive performance footage, showcasing such "electronica" artists as (this page, from top) Moby, Lords of Acid and The Crystal Method.

Because of this approach, the photography does not bear the distinct stylistic mark of any single individual.

Lighting was primarily relegated to available sources. Some supplemental illumination was added to interview situations and very dark nighttime locations where concert lighting did not provide enough wattage for a decent image. Reiss adds, "The VX-1000 really loves soft light, and one of our cameramen, Byron Shah, introduced us to Chinese lanterns. I'd known that some cinematographers used them, but hadn't realized how versatile they were, and how easily and cheaply they can be made. Basically, you can go to Pier 1 Imports, buy a lantern and a ceramic socket with a cord, and then screw in a Photoflood bulb — that's it. Actually, when you're using the VX-1000, a Chinese lantern with a 250-watt Photoflood can sometimes be too much!

"The VX-1000 has good aperture [gain] control, and an excellent auto white-balance mode. I don't remember ever having to balance the camera manually. You should always try to control the gain, so you reduce the video noise — I'd try not to shoot any higher than 3db of gain, though plenty of shots in the final cut were done at 18db gain. That brought up the noise, but it's not that bad. I was shooting one interview in New York that was lit by a single green 60-watt light bulb, and it came out great. If you shoot a film this way, you can really understand the idea behind the Dogma '95 'Vow of Chastity' that [Danish filmmakers] Lars von Trier and Thomas Vinterberg came up with."

Reiss's previous experience in filming concerts aided him throughout the *Better Living* shoot: "I'd learned how to focus in very low lighting conditions. That's a skill you have to learn by doing, and it's key to producing video footage that can be blown up to 35mm. Focus is not so noticeable on a small TV screen, but it can make or break a shot seen in a theater."

At the raves, the music-loving attendees generally greeted the filmmakers with enthusiasm. "Very rarely did people turn away from the camera," Reiss describes. "What was so ironic about these shows was that we went to great lengths to get clearance and permission to shoot, but there were always 10 kids there with camcorders. Nevertheless, we always made sure that we had official permission to shoot, just to avoid any potential problems."

"If you shoot a film this way, you can really understand the idea behind the Dogma '95 'Vow of Chastity' that Lars von Trier and Thomas Vinterberg came up with."
— director/cameraman Jon Reiss on shooting *Better Living Through Circuitry* with DV

Much of the film's concert footage was shot directly from the stage, bringing the viewer up close and personal with the hard-working performers operating sequencers and synthesizers as video displays, strobe lights and Par cans blasted the various venues. "Having filmed concerts for other projects, I know how rigid it can be in terms of getting access to the stage during performances," Reiss says. "The rock scene is very ossified and controlled, but while shooting The Crystal Method at this one club, we were right on the stage with them, and they didn't even look at me twice. There was no attitude of 'Hey, get out of my space!' like there might have been at a rock show. We'd cleared everything ahead of time, but I could stick my lens three inches from their keyboards and they just kept performing. It was a very refreshing, open environment." He also credits the compact VX-1000 with allowing him and his cameramen to be as as physically unobtrusive as possible.

Reiss and his team compiled over 150 hours of footage on 170 source tapes, which, he admits, "was a logging nightmare. One piece of software that helped us tremendously with that job was FileMaker Pro. We created a logging database and a master tape index, which was essential to keeping track of the production and being able to easily cross-reference footage. We also created databases for the music, music rights clearances, and other aspects of the project."

Virtually all of the postproduction work on *Better Living* — including editing, titles and visual effects — was completed in producer Brian McNelis's apartment using a Power Macintosh-based Media 100 non-linear digital editing system and Adobe After Effects. "Most of our material went through a completely digital process," Reiss says. "We did our offline edit with the Media 100 LX, and I think we're one of the first features to also edit online with a Media 100. We ran it on a Mac 9600/200 with 256 MB of RAM, using OS 8.1, an Adaptec 3940 UVW dual-channel drive controller, and Seagate drives. During the weekend when we did the online work, we just rented a DigiBeta deck, hooked it to the Media 100 and fed the tapes, running at 300 kilobytes per frame of component video. Offline, the Media 100 usually runs at about 5 to 20 kilobytes per frame. We used 72 GB of storage for the online work.

"Media 100 was very supportive of us, and we used their XS 4.5 online upgrade so we could finish the film with their system. They wanted to see somebody take their system further than other people had, and I

think they saw this as the perfect project to be involved with, since it was technology-oriented and had that DIY feeling. I certainly don't think that any other feature onlined with the Media 100 has as many edits as our does— we did about 2,500 to 2,600 cuts.

"Another great thing was that we were able to do our studio post using sound files coming directly from the Media 100. We were also able to do a lot in postproduction that would have been prohibitively expensive if we were working with film, such as doing precise moves on flat art. Granted, some of that work could have been done on an animation stand, but other design elements and titles in the film were completely animated in After Effects. It would have been impossible to do that with film because of the cost. Also, because we were doing digital post, we could incorporate computer graphics by particular artists into the film by directly porting them in. There was no intermediate step, like there would have been if we'd been working with film. That allowed us to have much more production value at a very reasonable cost."

Better Living's final digital master was output to 35mm film at 4MC in Burbank. Aided by 4MC rep Beverly Brooks, Reiss oversaw the tape-to-film grading session with timer Rich Erickson, and was surprised to see how much image control they had in terms of contrast and color saturation. "With the system they have, you can do scene-to-scene color correction," he describes. "It's not like working on the Flame, but you can do a fair amount of correction. 4MC has been very good to us and cut us a good deal on making the prints. After remastering the footage to the digital media that they use, they made the negative — print costs are very reasonable after that. Having viewed the 35mm test footage, I would say that the image quality is as good, if

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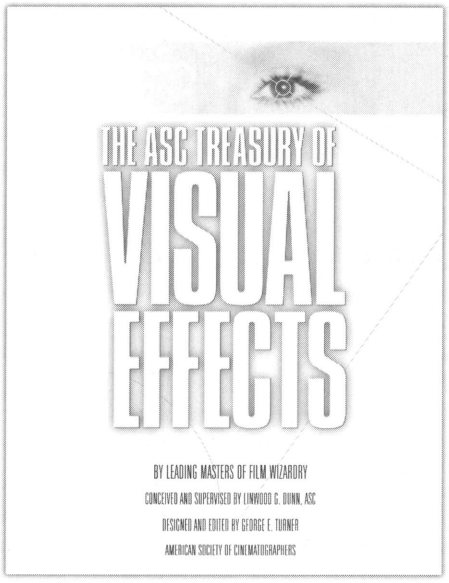

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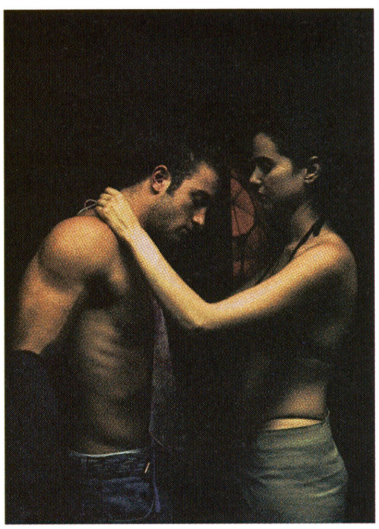
Hip Cinema

In *Saturn*, Drew (Scott Cann) and Sarah (Mia Kirshner) spend much of their time taking drugs and making out. The upper frame is set in Drew's loft, which cameraman Matthew Libatique often lent a green tint primarily through the use of fluorescent fixtures. The cameraman created a crisper ambience for Sarah's apartment, shown below.



not better, than if we had shot in 16mm and blown up to 35mm. Still, the key is the lighting, and you have to light with the video-to-film output in mind. It doesn't take much to light correctly, and the simplest lighting ultimately became the best lighting for our purposes, especially in interview situations."

The film was output with a 1.33:1 aspect ratio in order to retain all of the information originally captured. Reiss notes that at the time the filmmakers began shooting *Better Living*, Sony did not offer 16x9 capability for the cost-effective VX-1000, but he has since learned that it is possible to hack the camera's operating system to achieve this option, and that the full CCD chip would still be utilized.

Some critics have pointed out that *Better Living* does not delve deeply into the less savory aspects of rave culture, including drug use. "There's a myth that documentaries are objective," Reiss responds. "I wanted to make a film with a point of view. Because of the media, most people are only aware of the rave scene's 'dark side.' We discuss drug use and other negative things in the film, but I wasn't interested in propagating a viewpoint that was already out there. I have a positive impression of raves, and that's what I wanted to depict."

Reiss concludes, "I never planned to be a director of photography on this project, but it just kind of ended up that way, and it was a blast. I would have liked to have had someone else shooting the interviews, because it can be difficult for both the interviewer and the subject if you're doing the camerawork as well. When we started shooting *Better Living*, I had just come off of directing *Cleopatra's Second Husband*, for which I had a complete filming crew. I love working with a crew, but being largely on my own was great too."

— David E. Williams

Saturn
Director: Rob Schmidt
Cinematographer: Matthew Libatique

Saturn tells the story of a forlorn motorcycle mechanic named Drew (Scott Caan) who is enmeshed in an intense period of soul-searching. Unsure of his path in life, the young man spends most of his days nurse-maiding his father (Leo Burmester), a gifted engineer now crippled by Alzheimer's disease. Wandering the streets one night, Drew meets up with Sarah (Mia Kirshner), a wild woman with a taste for fast cars, designer drugs and kinky love. Drawn into Sarah's web of seduction, Drew begins to question his destiny's direction and whether or not love is truly a transcendent force.

"This is a very tough movie about love, so I wanted to be able see the actors perform, which meant much longer takes," says writer/director Rob Schmidt, who is currently collaborating with cameraman Bobby Bukowski on MGM's *Crime and Punishment in High School*. "I also wanted the camerawork in *Saturn* to have a subjective feeling, as if Brooklyn is being seen through the eyes of this messed-up kid. I wanted a dreamy, druggy feeling with lots of subjective focus."

Obtaining this idiosyncratic imagery was no problem, since Schmidt and cinematographer Matthew Libatique are quite familiar with each other's talents. The pair first worked together during their graduate-student days at the American Film Institute. In fact, Schmidt served as the cameraman's gaffer on two short films — *Protozoa* and *No Time* — which Libatique shot for fellow student Darren Aronofsky. Libatique would later join forces with Aronofsky on the film π (see Sundance Film Festival coverage in *AC* April '98).

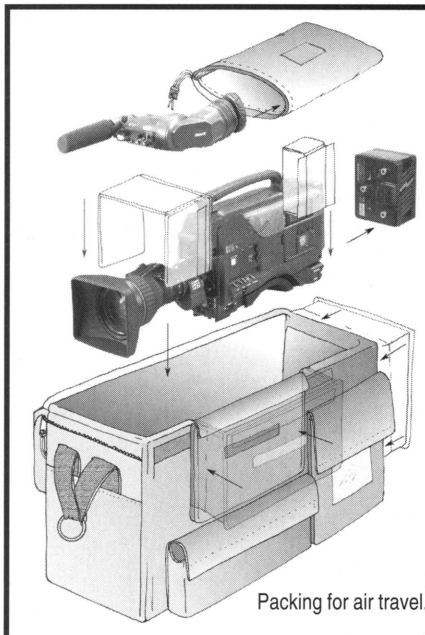
Saturn's muted palette stems

Saturn photos by Jay Astudillo, Steven Crell, Larry Riley and Brian Myers, courtesy of Sibling Entertainment.

from Schmidt's own rather subdued view of the world. He suffers from red-green color blindness, but can still discern saturation levels. The director also sought a color scheme that reflected the semi-autobiographical film's downbeat tone. He explains, "I wanted [visuals] that came out of black-and-white still photography — predominantly dark, low-contrast images with very solid blacks. The images would go from solid black to low contrast and never hit white unless they totally blew out."

To achieve a muted tonality with deep black tones, Libatique utilized a VariCon (set at about 30 percent, depending on the lighting situation) while shooting with his Arriflex BL-4. A Tiffen Soft/FX filter reduced sharpness and helped Libatique render Schmidt's so-called "dreamy, druggy feeling." Besides underexposing some of the interiors, the cinematographer also conjured up other in-camera trickery. During a dope-driven coupling between Drew and Sarah, Libatique sporadically blurred the imagery by alternating between sharp and soft focus. Additionally, using an 85mm lens, he panned along the pair's interwined bodies as first assistant James Ferrara stopped and started the camera to produce flash frames. Libatique explains that the combination of these techniques produced a "very soft yet full image, but the lighting is edgy enough so that the contrast still shows."

For added contrast control, Libatique considered subjecting his footage to FotoKem's skip-bleach process, but after conducting tests on various negatives and prints, he found that it produced a look that was too severe for his tastes. Instead, inspired by Darius Khondji ASC, AFC's imagery in *The City of Lost Children* and *Seven* (see *AC* Oct. '95), Libatique opted to use FotoKem's version of the ENR silver-retention process. "Using skip-bleach took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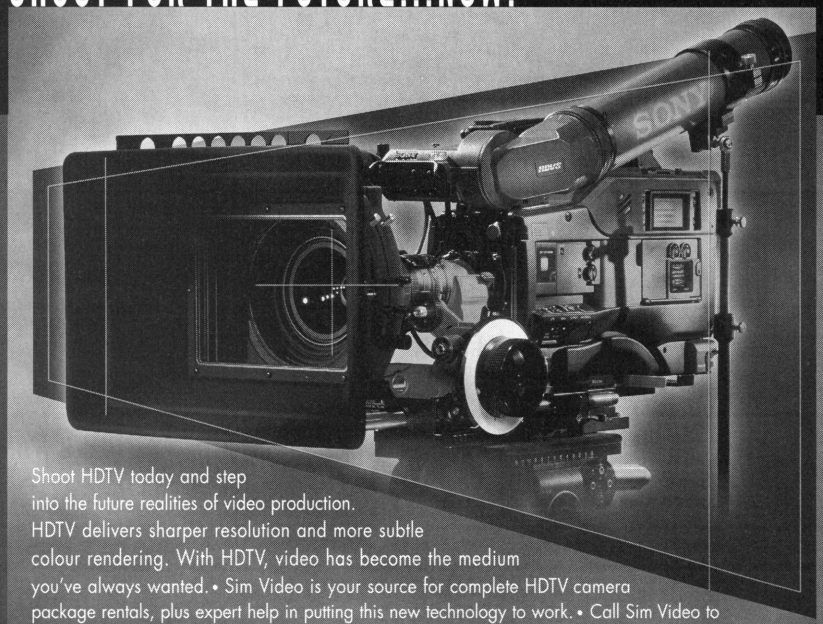

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things a little too far, creating a much harder film," Libatique describes. "With ENR, you can perform different strengths. At an [IR level] of 50, we were able to maintain a certain sense of softness, while at the same time regaining the black levels."

Nearly all of the film's interiors were sets constructed within a spacious (though rat-infested) industrial loft in Brooklyn. Both Schmidt and Libatique credit production designer James Chinlund for lending a disordered design to the deranged engineer's living quarters, filling the space with real and fake industrial castoffs. Libatique produced illumination to underscores the mournful mood. "The apartment, loft and workspace combine to create an intentional metaphors for the father's condition," the cinematographer notes. "You can see remnants of his brilliance, but the space is a mess, because that's exactly what he's become.

"Meanwhile, we lit Drew's face with a fluorescent green to reflect the heavy responsibility he has in fixing bikes and taking care of his father," Libatique adds. "Basically, Drew lives in their shop, so his bedroom mimics what's going in the center room — hence the green fluorescents. I let the natural color of the cool lights overtake the film to create a greenish hue. In Drew's room, I set up six 8' fluorescent tubes, and I would control the contrast with neutral density gels, by turning them on and off, lighting specific spots."

According to Libatique, his multi-tinted lighting style in *Saturn* takes some cues from Christopher Doyle, HKSC's photography in such Wong Kar-Wai pictures as *Chungking Express* (*AC* Sept. '95), *Happy Together* and *Fallen Angels* (*AC* Feb. '98). Like Doyle, Libatique elicits emotion by exploiting the harsh haze produced by fluorescent tubing, as well as auras cast by streetlamps and glowing neon signage. "Stylistically, *Saturn* could be described as 'Wong Kar-Wai and Chris Doyle meet *Breathless*,'" Libatique says. Indeed, *Saturn*'s fluid camera moves recall the intimate shooting style of Jean-Luc Godard's 1959 classic, which was shot by Raoul Coutard.

Creating a counterpoint to the grim reality of Drew's daily drudgery, the exchanges within his father's bedroom are imbued with an amber haze that cuts through the ailing man's shadowy bedroom. "For those scenes, James came up with some beautiful practicals [strip lights coming through muslin] that were hung over the father's bed. The design of the fixtures reflected the fact that the character had been an engineer, and the warm light is a metaphor for the father and son's relationship and love."

"Stylistically, *Saturn* could be described as 'Wong Kar-Wai and Chris Doyle meet *Breathless*.'" — cinematographer Matthew Libatique

Flashbacks of Drew and his Dad during happier times are also marked by golden ambiance. For those sequences, Libatique warmed up the actor's skin tones by using an antique suede filter. To fuzz the focus during these nostalgic interludes, he smeared Vaseline on the filter as "a low-fi technique to create a look that's different from the film's reality."

While shooting night exteriors on the streets of Brooklyn, Libatique pushed his low-contrast Kodak Vision 320T 5277 stock by one stop to lend some grain and realism to the nocturnal vistas. "When you're working with 800 ASA and shooting at a T1.3, everything outside suddenly becomes ambient fill," he says. "I didn't want overly-lit night exteriors, so my mantra was to make the light look natural and give it some direction. I used lot of Par cans to splash light here and there to create edges, and to augment sources that already existed. For one shot of Drew in a phone booth, we used existing sources coming from a brightly lit bodega in the frame. The Tiffen Soft/FX filter we used made the lights glow and every highlight bloom."

From the outset, Schmidt and Libatique knew that the photographic look they wanted for *Saturn* would demand extensive manipulation of the emulsion during postproduction. The cinematographer maintains that exploring and learning special lab processes only enhances one's command of the visual language. "Some films have a lot of camerawork and lighting, but on *Saturn*, it was a pretty equal division between camerawork, lighting and lab techniques," Libatique states. "For me, the lab is the final stage of photography — the more specific I can be [at that stage,] the more specific the film will look in the end. On π, for example, I worked very closely with the lab. It's my knowledge about the lab that created consistency in the film; it's really a matter of control."

— Andrew O. Thompson

Sweet Underground
Director: Dorsay Alavi
Cinematographer: Tom Ryan

Desolation and subtle lyricism imbue the vision of Los Angeles displayed in *Sweet Underground*, the first feature from writer/director Dorsay Alavi. The picture revolves around Jack Tallon (Matthew Flint) and a group of hapless young hipsters living on the city's fringes. By day, Jack cares for old junkies who squat in an abandoned warehouse: he provides them with drugs, ensures that they're relatively clean and safe, and confronts their apathetic family members to demand financial assistance. At night, Jack hangs out with his friends, a ragged group of

confused souls who battle personal demons while trying to carve out a life based on integrity rather than greed or compromise.

Sweet Underground's intriguing narrative structure moves from character to character, slowly unveiling their individual traumas. The separate dramas are further delineated by the use of both black-and-white and color stocks.

The film was photographed by Tom Ryan, whose first feature, Ping Ho's *Eighteen,* earned the cinematographer a nomination for Taiwan's Golden Horse Award in 1993. For *Sweet Underground,* Ryan and gaffer Jim Legoy fashioned a lighting style that exploits the use of color to quickly suggest different emotional states. In addition to this symbolism, well-choreographed movements make the camera a character in and of itself.

Dorsay Alavi notes that her prime inspirations for any film come from the world around her. "I'm always influenced by landscapes and architecture," says the filmmaker, an alumnus of the UC San Diego cinema program. "I'm also influenced quite a bit by painting, and by certain palettes. Downtown Los Angeles has a fascinating palette, and it's a part of the city that people just don't seem to know about. I chose to capture that area in this film because I thought it was an important place to this particular generation."

The key conceptual component of Ryan's cinematography in *Sweet Underground* is the balance between tonal contrasts. He explains, "The film embraces darkness. This was a smart choice in terms of our budget, but it's also an aesthetic and narrative decision. The characters and the setting teeter between light and dark, and walk a fine line between beauty and despair. Many decisions were based on respecting the way the characters have to move between these two extremes."

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Hip Cinema

Scenes from *Sweet Underground.* Above: In the plush opium den House of Matriarch, Billy (Kevin Patrick Walls) enjoys a rather surreal sexual encounter with the mysterious Lillith (Tre Tempirilli). Right: Jack (Matthew Flint) drifts into a thoughtful reverie during a tryst with lover Maxine (Cindy Lou Adkins).

age provided by Otto Nemenz — including a set of Zeiss Super and Standard Speed lenses ranging from 12 to 135mm, as well as a Cooke zoom — Ryan and Alavi opted to shoot the film almost entirely handheld. Typically, the director tends to prefer a lot of movement, a preference she attributes to her background in dance. Ryan also found this style appealing, even though the BL-3 is a bit heavy to operate handheld all day long. "It's not the lightest camera — it was made before the new ultra-lights like the Aaton or Moviecam — but it's nicely balanced and is a wonderful workhorse. In a lot of ways, the BL-3 is like the Volkswagen of cameras, and we never had a problem with it."

One minor difficulty did crop up due to atmospheric conditions. "We were shooting downtown in the middle of the summer, and I worked up a pretty good sweat, which made my eyepiece fog up," recalls Ryan. "Otto Nemenz got his people to work on the problem, and they gave us a heated eyepiece that helped a lot." Although he shot primarily with the camera on his shoulder, Ryan also had a doorway dolly, but he admits that there were many days when the lack of experienced crew members made using it too difficult.

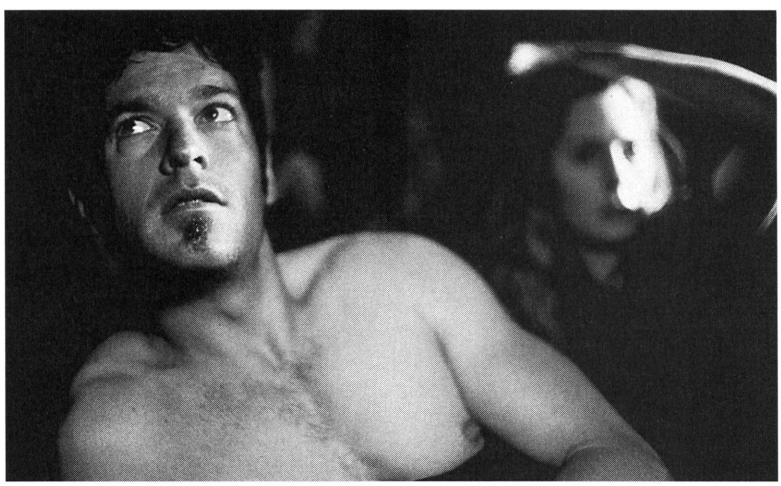
Since *Sweet Underground* is punctuated by so much darkness, as well as a very striking expanse of expressionistic colors, Ryan was quite concerned about his choice of film stocks. "I did extensive testing before we started shooting, because I wanted to really push the envelope of the black levels without letting the image get muddy," he says. "I did tests with Fuji and Ilford emulsions, but when we decided to shoot on short ends, Dorsay and I realized that we'd have a much easier chance of getting Kodak short ends. At any rate, the Kodak tests actually turned out to be more interesting. For the black-and-white sequences, we used Kodak 5222, which I pushed one stop to build up contrast. Most of the color footage was shot on [EXR] 5296 or 5298, and there are a few scenes where I pushed those stocks as well in order to get a kind of grittiness."

"The film embraces darkness. This was a smart choice in terms of our budget, but it's also an aesthetic and narrative decision."
— cinematographer Tom Ryan on *Sweet Underground*

The picture's monochromatic segments reflect the characters' sense of discomfort. Explaining the inspiration for the use of black-and-white, Alavi expounds, "I was haunted by the images from Frederick Wiseman's 1967 documentary *Titicut Follies*, which I saw in film school. When I imagined the old junkies living in this abandoned building, the images from that film came to mind. I also realized that black-and-white really worked well in showing how our characters are separated from the rest of society."

Ryan's relatively minimal lighting package included just one 4K HMI, two nine-lights, a couple of tweenies and babies, and several 100W and 200W peppers, but the cinematographer managed to conjure up a few tricks to make the best of his meager circumstances. "We also had a couple of old Leiko stage lights, which we could use to create shapes. We didn't have to create some of the light shapes seen in the distance by setting up 5 or 10 flags; we were able to do that inside the light and then just knock [the exposure] down a stop or two." Ryan also deployed a Shadowmaker acquired from the Great American Market. "It's basically a large magnetic gobo on which you can place little strips of steel to create shadows," he says. "Again, without hanging a bunch of flags, we could create these pools of light."

Ryan wasn't hesitant about creating compositions that bled into pitch darkness. "This is film is not afraid of the dark," he says. "Some of the frames consist of 40 percent or



The Sweet Underground photos taken by Shane Sato and Jack Gould, courtesy of Fourth Density Productions.

more black space. Rather than casting big sources and taking away light, we tended to use small ones in the background — including 12-volt halogen cabinet lights that we picked up at Home Depot — to create contrast." The cinematographer also had no qualms about manipulating night exteriors. "In the alleys there were mercury-vapor lights that would have polluted our color temperature, so we covered them with garbage bags or Duvateen."

The characters themselves are not always lit in a flattering style, but rather in a manner that defines their angst. "A lot of the men are lit with toplights, which looks harsh," Ryan describes. "To express some of the female characters' more whimsical situations, we often lit the props around them more prominently, as though to suggest that these objects defined them more than their actions." In one scene, for example, the cinematographer highlighted a flowery dress being exchanged between lesbian lovers as a celebration of their femininity.

Concerned that the actors' eyes would become lost in all of the darkness, Ryan "attached a Mini Flo to the camera's matte box with Velcro," he explains. "There was a little dimmer on it, and we had both daylight and tungsten bulbs. Typically, these lights are used for car interiors — under the dashboard or up on the visor — but by adapting them to run off a 12-volt battery belt, we were always able to get a glimmer of light in the actors' eyes." Ryan also used a dimmer-controlled China ball on the end of a pole for the film's many handheld shots.

At the conclusion of *Sweet Underground,* the film's combination of darkness and choreographed camera movement suddenly shifts, as motion and light collide in a dramatic climax that highlights the grace and lyricism of Alavi and Ryan's first feature together.

— Holly Willis

■

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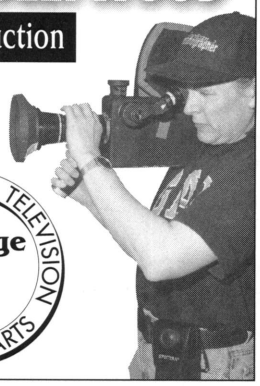

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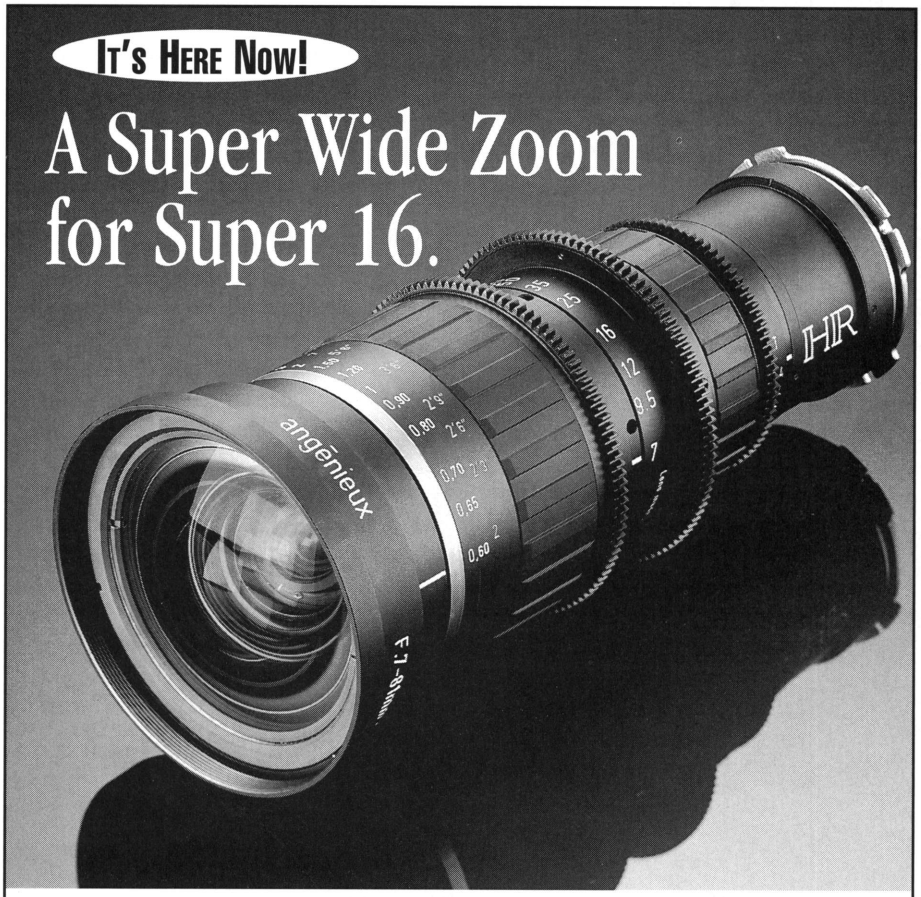

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A Classic Last Stand

Director Raoul Walsh and cinematographer Bert Glennon, ASC filmed a vivid account of General George Custer's life — and death — in the 1941 Western epic *They Died With Their Boots On.*

by Dan Gagliasso

Legendary director Raoul Walsh claimed that in the fall of 1941, when studio head Jack Warner first viewed the spectacular "Last Stand" climax in Walsh's *They Died With Their Boots On,* the mogul declared, "If Custer really died that way, then history should applaud him." Walsh was often given to self-serving exaggeration, but the reaction of Warner's good friend, media magnate William Randolph Hearst, was equally enthusiastic and well-recorded. After seeing the film in early December, Hearst wired Warner via Western Union: "GREATEST FILM I HAVE EVER SEEN. WENT TO SEE IT TWICE WITH MARION. RANDY."

The influence of Errol Flynn's colorful portrayal of George Armstrong Custer on several generations of filmgoers is undeniable. If Custer's image has been tarnished of late by revisionist historians who paint him as the very symbol of late 19th-century America's sins against its native people, only a Sioux or a Cheyenne who was a sore winner could not respond to the wonderful imagery that Warner Bros. brought to the screen with *Boots.*

Custer's final battle had been fertile fodder for numerous silent film treatments of the Little Big Horn incident, most notably Thomas Ince's *Custer's Last Fight* in 1912 and Universal's sweeping 1926 rendition in *The Flaming Frontier.* Warners' new entry would be the first of only a few subsequent attempts to film a full-blown biography, however inaccurate, of the controversial Civil War boy general and Indian fighter.

If it hadn't been for Jack Warner's friendship with publisher Hearst, however, *They Died With*

Their Boots On might never have seen the dark of a theater. In December of 1939, as a favor to one of his *Atlanta Georgian American* editors, Thomas Riply, Hearst had written to Warner to recommend Riply's modest-selling biography of Texas gunfighter John Wesly Hardin as possible film material.

Hearst's personal interest in the material was a decided plus for the Atlanta editor, and it took less than a month for Warner to work out a deal with Riply's Los Angeles-based agent. By January 20, 1940, Riply was depositing a $750 check in his bank account, courtesy of Warner Bros.

The studio's story department didn't seem to know what to do with the material; by all accounts, John Wesly Hardin was a charming but cold-blooded killer who, amongst other vicious deeds, delighted in gunning down black Texans and Hispanics with impunity. Story editors Richard Macauly and Jerry Wald advised Warners executive producer Hal Wallis that *They Died With Their Boots On* was a great title, but told him to forget about making Hardin the focal point of the film.

By July of that same year, Warners producer Robert Fellows, who would later become John Wayne's successful producing partner for most of the 1950s, asked contract writers Aeneas Mackenzie and Wally Kline to search for a Western film subject suitable for the title *They Died With Their Boots On.* It took the duo three months to finally find and push for "a biographical film on Custer that climaxed with the Black Hills gold rush." Make no mistake, the Black Hills gold rush, referred to in their notes, was synonymous with carrying the story all the way to the Last Stand. Producer Wallis gave them the okay to develop a treatment, and by December 5, 1940, he finally approved the writers to move on to a first-draft screenplay.

By March of 1941, without a completed screenplay in hand, Jack Warner was ready to commit the studio's charismatic swashbuckler, Errol Flynn to the lead role as the buckskin-clad Custer. Warner himself noted that, "Flynn in modern clothes just doesn't seem to go over… it seems the public only wants him in the outdoor productions we have been having him in." Business on Flynn's new contemporary film *Footsteps in the Dark* was down over 20 percent from his hugely successful period adventures, such as *The Adventures of Robin Hood* and *The Sea Hawk.*

By the time Mackenzie and Kline handed over their first draft in early May, it was obvious that they had given strong consideration to America's almost inevitable involvement in the war that was already ravaging most of Europe and Asia. Kline advised producer Wallis that "all consideration was given to construct a story which would have the best possible effect upon public morale in these present days of impending national crisis. I need not mention that when this picture opens, thousands of youths will undoubtedly be being trained for officers' commissions in hundreds of new and traditionless units which are even now being formed."

Hence, the patriotic Kline and Mackenzie decided to focus their Custer script on the bond between an officer and a regiment. Kline went on further to explain to Wallis that "if we can inspire [U.S. soldiers] to appreciation of a great officer and a great regiment in their own service, we will have accomplished our mission. You will observe that through the action of *They Died With Their Boots On,* Custer is selfish and self-serving at first, but comes to the realization that the regiment means more than glory to him, and sees no other course open to him but to die at the head of his doomed squadron." Kline's assessment may not have been entirely accurate, but how could Wallis or Jack Warner resist such a pitch?

Meanwhile, the casting for *Boots* was falling nicely into place. In the role of Elizabeth Custer, Olivia de Havilland would portray Flynn's love interest for the final time after seven previous and highly successful pairings, most notably in *The Adventures of Robin Hood* and *The Charge of the Light Brigade.* Her sister, Joan Fontaine, had been an early favorite for the part, but expressed little interest in playing second fiddle to Flynn's derring-do.

Arthur Kennedy had won out over Robert Preston, Van Heflin and several others to play Custer's ex-West Point antagonist, Ned Sharp. The film's crusty frontier scout, California Joe, was originally to have been portrayed by Flynn's regular sidekick, Alan Hale, but the part eventually went to the versatile character actor Charley Grapewine.

The character of Queen's Own Butler, the English soldier of fortune who joins the Seventh, was originally based on the real historical figure Lieutenant W.W. Cooke, with a bit of colorful fellow Seventh Cavalryman Captain Myles Keogh thrown in for

Opposite: Custer (Errol Flynn) confronts his destiny at Little Big Horn. The "Last Stand" was filmed in Agoura, next to rival Paramount studios' ranch property, a mere 40-minute drive from Warner's main Burbank lot. This page: Flynn shows off his heroic profile.

A Classic Last Stand

good measure. Writer Mackenzie began to worry that Cooke's descendants in Toronto might take offense and sue because of a slightly bawdy drunk scene. Cooke thus became the fictional Butler, and G.P. Huntly was chosen for the role.

The part of rough-and-ready Sergeant Doolittle went to tough guy Joe Sawyer, while the role of Sioux Chief Crazy Horse was awarded to Anthony Quinn, the only actor seriously considered for the job.

Jack Warner was known to be a notorious spendthrift who always tried to cut budgets to the bone. While other studios were spending $2,000,000 or more on their prestige projects, Warner often brought in similar films for almost half that amount. *Boots* was originally budgeted at $1,000,000 on a 42-day shooting schedule. By comparison, *Casablanca,* which was made the same year, cost $950,000, while John Huston made *The Maltese Falcon* for $375,000! Of course, neither of those films had required large numbers of extras or big battle scenes.

Still, Warner could smell box office all over *Boots.* Unfortunately, his headstrong and often irresponsible lead, Flynn, was giving him problems. Not only was Flynn in the middle of a particularly nasty divorce trial with French actress Lili Damita, but he was also refusing to work again with Warners' hard-nosed director of epic action, Michael Curtiz.

Flynn and Curtiz had battled on many previous successes for Warners, including *Robin Hood, The Charge of the Light Brigade* and *Dodge City.* Flynn had decided that he needed a bit more kid-glove handling than the very demanding Curtiz ever gave him.

To massage Flynn's ego, Jack Warner diplomatically hired veteran director Raoul Walsh to direct *Boots.* (Olivia de Havilland had told Flynn that she'd just had a wonderful experience working with the respected filmmaker.) Walsh had helmed Douglas Fairbanks in the silent classic *The Thief of Baghdad,* but his subsequent successes with *What Price Glory?* and *Carmen* had left him resting on his laurels a bit. He was reestablishing his reputation, however, with hard-boiled gangster pictures such as Humphrey Bogart's *High Sierra.*

Walsh was a man's man who specialized in the action genre. Once, when a junior producer suggested to Warner that Walsh direct a tender love story, Warner snapped back, "Walsh's idea of a tender love story is a bawdy-house burning down." Nevertheless, on *Boots,* his skillful handling of the scenes between de Havilland's Libbie Custer and Flynn's George provided some of the most heartfelt moments in an otherwise energetic action film.

Walsh's cinematographer on the show was one of the best in the business. Bert Glennon, ASC had done it all: he had been co-director of photography for Cecil B. De Mille in the 1920s, and had shot the silent version of *The Ten Commandments.* A favorite of John Ford's, Glennon had just been nominated for an Academy Award for his work on *Stagecoach* the year before, and had recently worked for Ford on the impeccably photographed *Young Mr. Lincoln.* The cameraman's involvement with anything relating to American Indians was especially appropriate; his fellow director of photography at De Mille's in the Twenties was still photographer Edward S. Curtis, who was world-renowned for his magnificent portraits of late 19th-century native tribesmen.

According to Walsh, he and Glennon had a comfortable working relationship on the picture. "I'd take him out and ask how it would be for him if we'd shoot a particular scene here or there," the director said. "If he wanted me to move 40 feet away and it didn't affect the background, I'd move. And I always consulted him on his light."

Occasionally, Walsh might ask Glennon which lens he was using. and "ask for a change from a two-inch to a 35mm or whatever." By and large, though, Walsh respected Glennon's expertise, and left the talented cameraman to his own devices. Glennon knew that Walsh loved low-angle shots — "side angles and real low angles just as though they were in a photographer's gallery." The experienced cinematographer had no problem satisfying both Walsh's tastes and his own.

The start of filming was originally slated for June 25, the 65th anniversary of the Little Big Horn fight, but Flynn's courtroom troubles pushed the start date back a week. On July 2, filming finally commenced in Stage 14 on the Warner Bros. lot with interior scenes that took place in Major Taipe's West Point office.

Walsh always said that he shot the complete sequence of Custer's Last Stand first, but a search of Warner Brothers' extensive archives reveals otherwise. Most of July was spent filming scenes set in West Point, Washington, D.C. and Monroe, Michigan. Pasadena's Busch Gardens stood in for the main gate of West Point, while other major building exteriors were shot on either the Warners lot in Burbank or the studio's sprawling ranch in Calabasas, 10 miles away.

Art director John Hughes did an admirable job of constructing the exterior of the original Custer home, as well as the Seventh Cavalry's headquarters buildings at Fort Abraham Lincoln, on the studio's ranch property. However, he did give in to convention when he enclosed part of the five-acre set with a log stockade and blockhouse. Still, the blockhouse was an almost exact duplicate of the one that existed at old Fort McKeen, only a few miles from the real Fort Lincoln.

By the end of July, it was time for Walsh to move on to some saber-clashing Civil War action. Top-notch second-unit director B. Reeves Eason was a magician at capturing exciting period cavalry battle scenes. He had been the impetus behind the thrilling climax in Flynn's earlier film *The Charge of the Light Brigade,* and also lent his skills to the chariot race in the original *Ben Hur.*

In *Boots,* the Civil War sequences representing Bull Run and Hanover would utilize approximately 100 mounted extras. Walsh always maintained that he was saddled with inexperienced riders, and there may have been some truth to that complaint in terms of the Last Stand shots, which featured up to 200 mounted men. Indeed, three men lost their lives during the course of filming, prompting KFI radio personality Erskine Johnson to publicly criticize Warner Bros. One rider died of a heart attack while atop his mount, and another, George Murphy, drunkenly ignored instructions to give up his horse, then fell off and broke his neck.

The third fatality was the most tragic. Ralph Budlong was a good polo player from Tucson who had not only just become a father, but was also worth close to a million dollars due to a recent inheritance. He was an experienced horseman who had often played polo against Flynn when the game was all the rage among such actors as Will Rogers, Spencer Tracy and Clark Gable. Budlong had insisted on using a real saber in the Bull Run bridge sequence, where the usual prop wooden saber would have sufficed, but a planned special effects explosion spooked his horse. According to the official inquest report eight days later, "his saber fell out of his hand at the time of his fall and apparently reached the ground hilt-first by the time Budlong came down on it." Stuntman and Flynn crony Buster Willis helped rush the seriously injured man to Cedars of Lebanon Hospital, where Budlong lingered for several days before dying from advanced peritonitis. In his autobiography, Flynn tells virtually the same story with the same background, except that someone named Bill Meade is the rider he claims was killed — during the filming of *The Charge of the Light Brigade.*

After Budlong's death, the normally pugnacious Walsh may have been a bit skittish about exposing any other performers to the possibility of serious injury. He was soon making sounds about not using any falling horses in the upcoming battle scenes. In a memo dated August 1, production manager Mattison informed Walsh that Mr. Warner himself was insisting upon using falling horses in these scenes. Mattison then reported back to the studio head that stunt pay for the Last Stand sequence was going to be tremendous.

Stunt pay did prove to be exorbitant. The work was dangerous, fast and hard, but the cowboy stuntmen didn't mind. Many of them wound up pulling down up to $250 a day, while the average working man at the time made $65 a week. Two of the stunt community's best men doubled for the principals. The legendary Yakima Canutt stood in for Flynn, while John Ford's future second-unit director, Cliff Lyons, doubled for Anthony Quinn as Crazy Horse.

The finished film reveals that Walsh may have gotten his way on the falling-horse issue. Unlike *The Charge of the Light Brigade,* for which numerous horses were killed doing fixed-wire falls, *Boots* exhibited none of the brutal-looking equestrian action that was so prevalent in pre-1940 films. There is reason to believe that *Light Brigade's* excesses helped

The Seventh Cavalry gallops into history. A 60' camera platform helped the filmmakers capture the panoramic action of the climactic battle sequence, which featured 400 extras on horseback.

A Classic Last Stand

Custer has a face-to-face-confrontation with his Indian rival, Crazy Horse (Anthony Quinn).

outlaw such falls well before *They Died With Their Boots On* went into production, and a Humane Society representative was on hand for at least a few days of filming.

One battle Jack Warner did win concerned the issue of where Custer's Last Stand would actually be shot. Walsh wanted to film it among the polished rocks of the Iverson Ranch in Chatsworth, where the production had already captured several scenes of Custer's wagon train and troops moving through Sioux territory.

Mattison and Robert Fellows advised Walsh that if they let him shoot there, "Mr. Warner would personally throw both of us in the alley." There was no conceivable way the production would ever get the 400 men, 200 horses and necessary crew members onto the rock-strewn location Walsh had picked. It was finally agreed that Lasky Mesa in Agoura, located several miles west of the Calabasas Ranch and almost adjacent to Paramount Studios' ranch, would serve as the site for the Last Stand sequence.

Walsh wanted some real Indians on hand to add authenticity to the film, so in early August, assistant Mace Littson was dispatched to the Standing Rock Agency near Fort Yates, North Dakota. He brought back 16 Sioux men who were willing to come play Hollywood for a few weeks for the princely sum of five dollars a day and expenses.

If Agency Superintendent L.C. Lippert had known what his charges were in for, he might not have agreed to the deal. Three of the Standing Rock Sioux were involved in a traffic accident that was not their fault, and Jack Red Bear wound up in the hospital for several weeks. The rest of the Sioux men were enjoying their Hollywood hotel and the local restaurants and nightspots, but weren't so sure about the filming they were witnessing. No wonder: studio publicity claimed that two of them were the great-grandsons of revered Sioux leader Sitting Bull, who had helped rout Custer and his men that fateful day in 1876.

Filming on the complicated Last Stand sequence got underway on August 12, at which time the production was only five days behind schedule. In his memoirs, Walsh promoted the idea that most of his extras those first few days could hardly ride a horse. But according to Mattison's studio reports, the production weeded out only about 30 of the 200 men who needed to be mounted. He then gratefully noted that all of the old-time cowboys who were working offered to do their time as Indian riders, which the show sorely lacked in sufficient numbers.

Still, Mattison did comment that the injuries that occurred seemed to be sustained by the most experienced men, including old hands Al Delamore and Curly Gibson. As a practical joke, Anthony Quinn even hired a hearse to follow the extras' buses out to Lasky Mesa. There were enough bumps, bruises and breaks to keep two ambulances, two doctors, four first-aid men and a nurse on hand at all times, and the production began to fall even further behind schedule.

During some of the shots, Walsh was directing Glennon, second assistant cameramen Ellsworth Fredricks (a future ASC fellow) and Benny Cohen while stationed high atop a massive 60-foot tower made of welded tubular steel. From this vantage point, the filmmakers captured some truly spectacular panoramic shots of Custer's surrounded troopers being decimated by the Sioux warriors.

Flynn was out for several more days, due to his divorce court proceedings and a severe adverse sinus reaction to all of the smoke and dust being churned up during the vigorous battle scenes. Given all of the wide combat footage still to be filmed, however, it was easy to shoot around him. Flynn or no Flynn, the production was falling even further behind schedule.

Warners publicity chief Bob Taplinger was having a field day, trumpeting the presence of Sitting Bull's relatives and floating a totally erroneous claim that Flynn was using Custer's actual saber from Little Big Horn. Taplinger's press release claimed that the good citizens of Custer City, South Dakota had loaned the production the rare relic. The sword in question was rare indeed, since as any Custer buff worth his buckskin jacket will tell you, historical record verifies that Custer and his men had left their sabers behind on that fateful day!

As the Last Stand scenes dragged on, the budget soared to the tune of almost $20,000 for each new day the production fell behind. With his newly-negotiated contract, Flynn alone cost $6,000 a week. But Jack Warner had taken a personal interest in the production, right down to making detailed lists of second-unit shots that he felt B. Reeves Eason needed to do. Included in Warner's instructions were various pit shots, low angles, Akeley camera shots and mechanical horse scenes to feature

some angles of Quinn's Crazy Horse grasping the fallen Seventh Cavalry's guidon.

By September 30, the cast and crew's tribulations were behind them. At 5:15 p.m., after doing 23 setups with the second unit and several interior scenes of Flynn on Stage 6 back on the lot, shooting was wrapped. *Boots* officially wound up 26 days behind schedule and some $350,000 over budget. Editing, scoring and minor special effects, including one matte painting of the Indian village, took less than two months before Warners finally released the finished film to the theaters on December 1, 1941.

Thanks to Flynn's effective star turn, no film would have more influence on the public's perception of Custer until the release of *Little Big Man* in 1970. *Boots* was quite a success at the box office upon its initial release, taking in over $2,500,000. If one factors in inflation since 1942, it ranks as the seventh top-grossing Western film of all time.

Most critics, as well as the public, loved the romance, action and spectacle. An excerpt from Mackenzie and Kline's scripted version of Custer's last moments hints at the magic that was captured on film:

Crazy Horse leading his massed warriors in an overwhelming charge to engulf the doomed remnant of the Seventh Cavalry. The screaming braves and their flying feathers crash over the feeble rampart of dying men and dead horses. They reach the golden Colonel. He stands alone, bareheaded with a blazing gun in each hand.

After a quick dissolve and one more brief scene back at Fort Lincoln, composer Max Steiner's stirring rendition of the Seventh Cavalry's Regimental song, "Garry Owen," builds over the ghostly image

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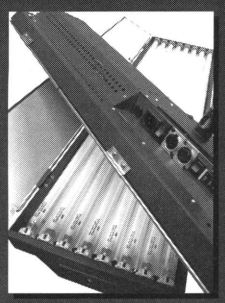

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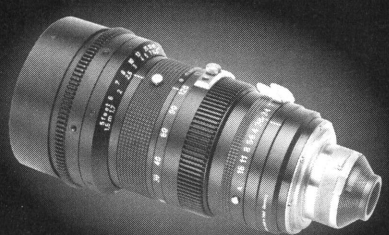

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of Custer and the Seventh. We hear John Litel's General Sheridan tell Olivia de Havilland, "Come my dear... your soldier won his last fight after all." Jack Warner was absolutely right — if it didn't really happen that way, it should have. ■

Dan Gagliasso is a screen and television writer. He has also worked as a historical consultant and researcher, most recently on John Milius' Rough Riders *mini-series, and has penned numerous magazine articles on historical Western films and their relationship to real history. His book* The Celluloid Custer *will be published next year by the University of Nebraska Press.*

Credits

A Warner Bros. *Picture; directed by* Raoul Walsh; *executive-produced by* Hal Wallis; *supervising producer,* Robert Fellows; *screenplay by* Wally Kline and Aeneas McKenzie (*additional dialogue by* Lenore Coffee); *director of photography,* Bert Glennon ASC; *music by* Max Steiner; *art director,* John Hughes; *film editor,* William Holmes; *unit manager,* Frank Mattison; *assistant director,* Russ Saunders; *second assistant director,* Claude Archer; *second-unit director,* B. Reeves Eason; *script supervisor,* Eugene Busch; *dialogue director,* Jo Graham; *costumes (men's),* Dick Moder; *costumes (women's),* Katherine Grams; *gowns,* Milo Anderson; *technical advisor,* Lt. Colonel John E. Taylor, U.S. Army, Retired; *second assistant cameraman,* Ellsworth Fredericks; *assistant cameraman,* Benny Cohen; *makeup supervisor,* Perc Westmore; *makeup,* Ward Hamilton and Harlan Phillips; *hairdresser,* Nellie Manly; *property master,* Eddie Edwards; *prop assistants,* Buddy Friend, Bill Wallace, R. Cooper; *sound,* Dolph Thomas; *boom boy,* Dick H. Williams; *cable man,* Everett A. Hughes; *recorder,* Ralph Owen; *best boy,* Mickey Moran; *grip,* William Classen; *head wrangler,* Clyde Hudkins; *assistant to producers,* Mace Littson; *publicity,* Robert Taplinger

George Armstrong Custer, Errol Flynn; *Elizabeth Bacon Custer,* Olivia De Havilland; *Ned Sharp,* Arthur Kennedy; *California Joe,* Charley Grapewine; *Samuel Bacon,* Gene Lockhart; *Crazy Horse,* Anthony Quinn; *Major Romulus Taipe,* Stanley Ridges; *General Phillip H. Sheridan,* John Litel; *Senator Sharp,* Walter Hampden; *General Winfield Scott,* Sydney Greenstreet; *Fitzhugh Lee,* Regs Toomey; *Callie,* Hattie McDaniel; *Lieutenant Butler,* G.P. Huntly, JR.; *Captain Webb,* Frank Wilcox; *Sergeant Doolittle,* Joseph Sawyer; *Senator Smith,* Minor Watson; *Lieutenant Roberts,* Gig Young; *Second Lieutenant Davis,* John Ridgely; *President Grant,* Joseph Crehan; *Mrs. Sharp,* Aileen Pringle; *Mrs. Taipe,* Anna Q. Nilsson; *Youth,* Harry Lewis; *Cadet Brown,* Tod Andrews; *Rosser,* Walter Brooke; *Captain McCook,* Selmer Jackson; *Frazier,* William Hopper; *Corporal Smith,* Eddie Acuff; *Waiter,* Sam McDaniell; *Charles,* George Reed; *Jones,* Pat McVey; *Adjutant,* William Forrest; *Lieutenant Walsh,* James Seay; *Captain Riley,* George Eldridge; *Colonel,* John Hamilton; *Nurses,* Renie Riano, Edna Holland, Minerva Urecal, Virginia Sale, Vera Lewis; *Station Master,* Spencer Charters; *Men in Bar,* Frank Orth, Ray Teal; *Clergyman,* Hobart Bosworth; *Staff Sergeant Brown,* Dick Wessell; *Staff Officer,* Weldon Heyburn; *Orderlies,* Harry Strang, Max Hoffman Jr., Frank Mayo; *Salesman,* Irving Bacon; *Officers,* Garland Smith, Roy Barcroft, Dick French, Marty Faust, Bob Perry, Paul Kruger, Steve Darrell; *Colonel of First Michigan,* Russell Hicks; *Colonel of Fifth Michigan,* Victor Zimmerman; *Soldier,* Ian MacDonald; *Sentries,* Lane Chandler, Ed Parker; *Adjutants,* Sol Gross, Addison Richards; *Telegrapher,* Jack Mower; *Jane,* Alberta Gary; *Maid,* Annabella Jones; *Major Smith,* Hugh Southern; *Tillaman,* Arthur Loft; *Sergeant,* Carl Harbaugh; *Corporal,* G. Pat Collins; *Woman,* Virginia Brissac; *Settler,* Walter Baldwin; *Bartenders,* Wade Crosby, Joe Devlin, Fred Kelsey; *Newsman,* Herbert Heywood; *Chairman,* Joseph King; *Congressman,* Ed Keane; *Veteran,* Francis Ford; *President Grant's Secretary,* Frank Ferguson; *stunt doubles,* Yakima Canutt, Cliff Lyons.

Released December 1, 1941; 138 minutes.

Resources

The Warner Brothers Studio Archives-University of Southern California (Leith Adams, Ned Comstock); The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Science's Margaret Herrick Library (Sam Gill, Robert Cushman, Faye Thompson, Barbara Hall); Rudy Behlmer, *Inside Warner Bros. (1935-1951)* (New York: Viking, 1985); Richard Schickel, *The Men Who Made the Movies* (New York: Antheneum, 1975); Buster Wilies, *My Days With Errol Flynn: The Autobiography of a Stuntman* (Santa Monica: Roundtable Publishing, 1988); Raoul Walsh, *Each Man in His Own Time* (New York; Farar, Straus and Giroux, 1974); Professor Paul Hutton, University of New Mexico Department of History; Professor Brian Dippie, University of Victoria Department of History; Father Vincent Heier, St. Louis, Missouri.

Short Takes

Rapping Cowboys and Cancer Cash

Big Willie Goes West
by Stephanie Argy

While planning the music video for Will Smith's "Wild Wild West," the rapping actor's title cut for the soundtrack of the feature film of the same name, director Paul Hunter took cinematographer Thomas Kloss into a huge soundstage filled with pieces of sets from the Warner Bros. movie (see full coverage beginning on page 36). "Paul introduced me to the project and to Will Smith, and then we started talking about what we would try to achieve," remembers Kloss. "The immediate question was, 'What are the technical obstacles?'"

Their mission was to create a flashy, feature-like look on a music-video schedule and budget. Kloss offers, "I think the biggest challenge for us was to understand the scope of the project and to explain what we thought we needed in order to perform at that level."

By music-video standards, the scope of the eight-minute-long clip was enormous, requiring a 14-day shooting schedule to capture Smith in his James T. West character, singing, dancing, and rescuing damsel-in-distress Rita Escobar (Salma Hayek, re-creating her role from the feature film) from a variety of perils.

Though the "West" video relies heavily upon Barry Sonnenfeld's movie for its content, Hunter and Kloss sought to lend the video an identity and look of its own, rather than slavishly imitate the motion picture. After studying director of photography Michael Ballhaus, ASC's work in the movie, Kloss decided to strive for a markedly different visual style. The only actual matching between the movie and the video was the re-creation of four of the film's main sets.

Clad in his snappy *Wild West* duds, Will Smith (in background) leads fellow vocalists Kool Moe Dee, Dru Hill, and a posse of dancers through the ambitious "Wild Wild West" music video.

Photos by Bruce W. Talamon, courtesy of Warner Bros.

Even before the opening notes of Will Smith's gun-slinging, desperado rap, the video opens with an intimate, nighttime bedroom sequence between Smith and Hayek, which is set in a small, rustic log cabin. Within this romantic, candlelit scene, we witness the diabolical shenanigans of West's arch-nemesis, the evil Dr. Arliss Loveless, as he has the alluring Hayek kidnapped from their warm love-nest.

Breaking into the song, the camera then rushes toward Smith standing amid Warner Bros.' backlot Western town — which is completely engulfed in flames — as he performs the opening verse. Illuminated in warm ¾ frontal firelight, framed in front of saturated

Right: Rita Escobar (Salma Hayek) is kidnapped and held by the evil Dr. Loveless. The video alternately features cool-blue and warm lighting to carry the sense of extreme contrast beyond the lights and darks. Bottom: Smith confers with director Paul Hunter.

yellow-orange flames with hints of deep-blue moonlight rimming the rapper, the imagery is slightly more stylized than that of its feature-film cousin. The video's look features crushed blacks, crisp glowing whites, and luminous colors, which were accentuated with the aid of colorist Stefan Sonnenfeld of Company 3 in Santa Monica, California.

Next, the production moved on stage to shoot in a huge greenhouse-like structure that served as the home base for Loveless. This set was used for addition performance by Smith (featuring rapping companions Dru Hill and Kool Moe Dee) as well as for a showdown between Loveless and West.

Finally, the cast and crew finished up their work in a cavernous theater in Hollywood, where the production staged a lavish, Western-saloon-style party sequence. Kloss details, "There we shot a whole dance sequence, and the party scene featuring cameos by various people [including Stevie Wonder as the piano player]. Also, this served as the segue for the battle between West and Loveless as the villain sends a big chandelier crashing to the dance floor."

Lighting the enormous sets was a test for the cinematographer. While the shots were on the same scale as scenes in the feature, the video crew had to do them with less money and crew members than their feature counterparts. As Kloss notes, however, understanding and working within limitations is a big part of cinematography. "You

have learn to fit the size and scope of the project to your [available resources], not what you want," he says.

Because Kloss and his gaffer, Norm Harris, were under so much time pressure, they decided to keep things as flexible as possible by using either six-lights, nine-lights or Dinos. "Those were all interchangeable bulbs," says Kloss. "You could rig a light and say, 'I'm a stop under or a stop over,' and then click a couple of switches on or off. With other lights, you can't do that."

Kloss added a bit of smoke to the mix, an approach that enabled him to create rich, dramatic lighting with a wider spread, while eliminating the need to hang 20 lights or re-rig things constantly. "Often, we lit a shot with four nine-lights, and then supplemented the illumination with single bulbs off the ground — such as Par 64 cans — wherever we needed a bit more exposure. Still, the basic lighting was provided by four Maxis with nine-lights that had narrow dichroic bulbs."

Kloss generally used nine-lights aimed though 12' x 12' grid cloths to create some fill and a very soft look. "I would say [to the crew], 'Go two stops under or a stop-and-a-half under, just don't overlight them.'" Another of his tricks to keep things moving quickly and easily was to keep everything on wheels. "I had the grips rig all of the equipment to be rollable so it wouldn't take as long to reset things." This tactic proved particularly helpful for shooting reverse angles of shots. "We could basically just roll everything behind the camera again," he explains.

That kind of adaptability was crucial on this particular video. "We never tried to get into complicated rigging situations," he says. "We had our sets pre-lit and pre-rigged, and almost everything else beyond that was flexible lighting. We had one light — a nine-light on a Condor — that served as our emergency light. It could reach anywhere, and we could put it wherever it was needed. Everything else was pretty much on rollers at ground level."

Kloss says that he tried to light the actors from the top and from behind. "I didn't want to light them from the camera, but I still wanted to make them look good. We tried to backlight them, or side-backlight them, and then add just a very soft frontal fill light. I thought that looked good on Will, and it made the video very rich-looking."

The cinematographer says he never worried about the differences between the various cast members' skin tones. "I don't mind the skin-tone difference onscreen," he says. "If I shoot Salma Hayek next to Will Smith, I don't want Will to look as bright as Salma anyways. I'm much more concerned about being able to read their eyes. I don't care if Will goes a little dark next to Salma, as long as I can see his eyes and the expression on his face. "

Kloss adds that he avoided using lens diffusion, particularly on Smith. "In my basic photographic approach, I try not to use any diffusion. Diffusion filters make more sense when you are doing film postproduction, as opposed to video postproduction. Video post gives you the many more options in terms of softening, sharpening and manipulating the image." He also points out that using

lens diffusion is not the same as softening the light. "It's confusing if you think you can make the light softer by shooting with diffusion filters. Those are two separate issues."

Kloss says that he used long lenses only on extreme close-ups, preferring to stay with wide lenses that would show off the full scope of the sets. "We tried to portray the spaces," he offers. "We tried to do them justice by shooting extremely wide and giving the audience a sense of where the whole video took place. In my opinion, the music video is also a kind of commercial for the movie, so I wanted to give the audience a strong visual taste of the feature's various environments."

The lens he used most was the 14mm from the new Cooke series. "The photography in this video is a very good example of what the Cooke lenses stand for; they help to create really rich blacks and strong contrast, and they allow you to read into all of the various shades. The [Kodak Vision 500T] 5279 film stock also helps that kind of photography a lot, and it was the only stock we used."

In his approach to lighting, Kloss prefers to have room to experiment and find the right strategy for the task at hand. "I sometimes feel very restricted if the lighting becomes too specific and too rigid," he says. "I personally need to rough things in — to get a take on the scene and a sense of whether the lighting is the way I want it to be, or to decide whether the source is too big or small. I take my indications from my first try at something, and I may rough something in for maybe 10 minutes. I'll set up a six-light or a nine-light and look at it on the left or the right or from behind the actors, and then get an idea of how it looks. Then I might say, 'Okay, that's a good approach — now what else does the scene need?' At that point we'll get a bit more detailed with the lighting."

Kloss says that the scale of the "Wild Wild West" video never struck him until the job was finished — which, he admits, was probably for the best. "It's good that it doesn't dawn on me that these projects are so big until they're done," he says. "If you suddenly sense the scope of what you're doing while you're in the midst of things, it can be very intimidating. For me it is necessary to be ignorant of those things on a certain level, because that allows me go into the job without so much fear."

He concludes that it's equally important to understand the vision of the director. "You want to start it clean and try to focus on what the director wants," he says. "The boundaries are given by the director or the producer. If the project is wide enough in their imagination, then you'll have a wide canvas to paint on."

Taking Tobacco Companies to Task

by Linda Whalen

Editor's Note: Due to a printing error in this space last month, an entire column of text was excised from the following article. We have therefore decided to rerun the piece in its entirety.

It has been 26 years since the FCC banned cigarette commercials from television — a fact not lost on Jeff Goldsmith, who recently directed "Cancer Cash," a strong anti-smoking Public Service Announcement. "I wanted to get away with murder," says Goldsmith, whose spot implies that tobacco companies have done just that over the years. In ultra-glamorous game show style, the PSA plays on tobacco company promotions like "Camel Cash." Rather than jackets, towels, and T-shirts, however, smokers who collect enough "Cancer Cash" exchange it for items like chemotherapy and coffins.

Health groups have long been concerned that tobacco company giveaways glamorize smoking and ignore health dangers, targeting young people and encouraging them to smoke. Geared toward the same audience, the PSA uses dark humor to focus young people on the very real effects of cigarette use.

A native of Kansas, Goldsmith earned a degree from USC in Theater and Film in the early Ninties. He and director of photography Steve Adcock hooked up a couple of years later, when the former was helming a music-video

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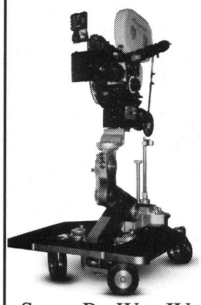
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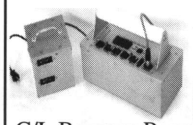
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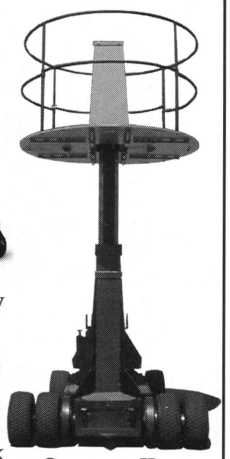
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An array of images from the inventive PSA "Cancer Cash," which lambastes cigarette company propaganda with pitch-black humor.

project, and the duo began a collaboration that continues today.

Adcock credits Goldsmith's drive and marketing skills for getting the high concept "Cancer Cash" project shot on a bare-bones budget. When Goldsmith pitched the American Cancer Society, he came prepared with a treatment, script, storyboards and meticulous research. The ACS was impressed enough to give him a letter of support, which Goldsmith and his company, Unlikely Films, used to procure pro bono contributions from equipment and service providers, including Otto Nemenz, Universal City Studios, Xenotech and Digital Domain.

Individual experiences varied among cast and crew, but all had one thing in common: the desire to send a message to young people about the potential dangers of smoking. Actress Marissa Johnson, diagnosed with a potentially fatal lung condition, still struggles with a three-pack-a-day habit she's had since the age of 13. Voiceover artist John Frost wore a nicotine patch during his recording session. Video effects supervisor Mark Larranaga is convinced that his parents' two-pack-a-day habit contributed to his lifelong asthma. All of these people donated their time and energy.

Goldsmith seems to successfully ride the line between control freak and collaborator by virtue of his boundless enthusiasm and impressive store of knowledge. "The nice thing about working with Jeff is that he knows exactly what he wants, and he's very proficient technically," says Adcock. Goldsmith also recognizes a good suggestion when he hears one, however; while shooting components of the final scene, Adcock suggested that rather than have an actor in the spot exhale a lungful of smoke before disappearing, he should inhale the cloud, and then dissolve. Goldsmith loved the idea, and the resulting image is stark and chilling.

Given the "the keys to the backlot" at Universal, Goldsmith and art director Nicole Lee came upon an abstract green neon light, which they decided was a perfect background for the opening shot. The neon light was placed on a brick wall flat to simulate a back-alley nightclub entrance. Adcock mounted a Xenon lamp behind the wall, and set a mirror over the actors to create the hot, slightly exaggerated look of a streetlamp. To eliminate the hard line of the neon, and to keep the background slightly out of focus, Adcock used a 200mm Nikon lens, moving the camera as far back as possible to add depth.

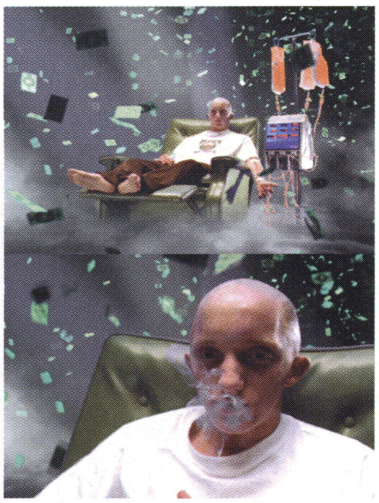
A mirror ball swirls over a coffin display, sparkling and sending dappled light dancing around the background. Adcock and gaffer C.E. Courtney rigged two mirror balls for the shot, one in and one out of frame. Both balls were lit with a 4K Xenon and spun simutaneously, producing a disco effect. As the coffin spins around the turntable, a gleam of light follows the chrome edge, while Adcock's star filter gives it the perfect "ding" of a game-show prize.

Making the most of what he has to work with seems to be Adcock's forte. When shooting the coffin at eye level didn't quite work, the cameraman spotted a scissor lift at the back of the soundstage. He soon pressed the lift into service, using it as a crane for the next two shots.

To shoot the PSA's four sets, Adcock employed a Arri-35 III fitted with a 35mm prime. Universal provided both electricity and a tungsten lighting package. A 4K Xenon light was employed strategically to give the piece a hard-edged look. Kodak's Vision 500T 5279 film (also donated) was used, Adcock says, "for its strong blacks and all-around versatility." Since the entire spot was shot MOS, and because Adcock and gaffer Courtney know each other so well, the crew leapfrogged ahead of Adcock, saving critical time during the one-day shoot.

Goldsmith also relied on storyboards to keep his costs down, particularly for a shot that ostensibly takes place on a football field. After realizing that building the field on a soundstage was as unlikely as it was impractical, the filmmakers opted for a more creative approach. Adcock lit the shot's actor, who prances around the field in an oxygen mask and tanks, with two 20Ks through a silk, and again employed the scissor lift, placing the camera directly above the actor and shooting straight down onto a patch of green astroturf.

In the spot's only dolly shot, a pull-back from a tropical sunset reveals an



Images courtesy of Jeff Goldsmith, Unlikely Films, Inc.

actress reclining on a deckchair and sporting a swimsuit, a full tracheal tube (illuminated from within by a disco-style string of light-emitting diodes) and a ventilator. The painted sunset on the backdrop was warmed by positioning a 5K directly behind the "sun," and aiming it straight at the camera. Adcock then bounced a pair of Maxi-Brutes off a 4' x 4' Griffolyn to add a warm glow. Rim-lighting the actor with a 10K and full CTS gel completed the soft look of sunset.

To cap the spot, Goldsmith had envisioned a final image of a young chemotherapy patient who disappears, like the smoke he inhales, into a void filled with smoke amid a hail of falling "Cancer Cash." When this idea proved too difficult to shoot practically, given the project's limited time and budget, the filmmakers opted for a bluescreen shot. Once the background was set for true blue with the help of seven Kino Flo light-banks, Adcock began shooting the elements needed for the final edit. "Cancer Cash" bills, dropped from the scissor lift, were shot in the foreground, midground and background of the set, and later converted to a slow, constant frame rate on a Flame station in post. The green cash was backlit to minimize the reflection of the bluescreen on the glossy paper, and to create some highlights as it fell.

Adcock set up the dissolve "the old-fashioned way." First, he shot the actor in his chair in front of the bluescreen. After locking off the camera, he drew the outline of the actor on the video

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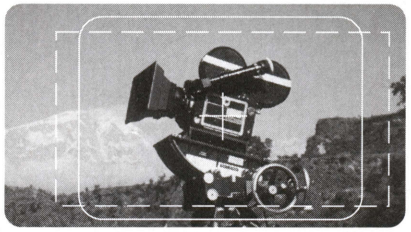

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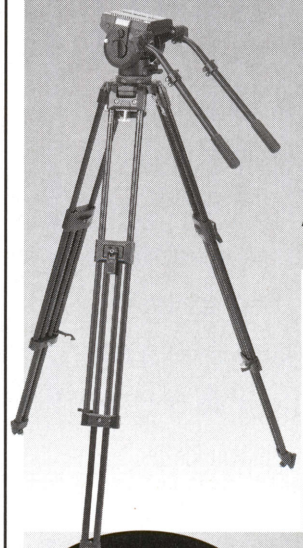

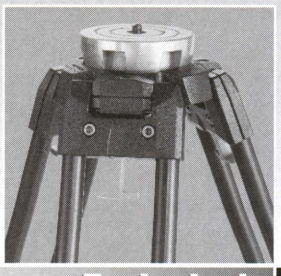

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AC's NEW LOOK EARNS AWARDS

The judges of two prestigious publishing competitions recently declared *American Cinematographer*'s stylish redesign to be a big hit. At the Western Publications Association's **Maggie Awards**, held on April 23 at the Westin Hotel in Los Angeles, *AC* took home the top prize in the **Best Cover (Trade)** category for the **January 1998** issue, which featured an expressive shot from Steven Spielberg's *Amistad* (left). That particular issue of the magazine introduced *AC*'s new, more streamlined look, which resulted from a close collaboration between longtime art director Martha Winterhalter and award-winning design consultant Alan Alpanian.

In addition to the Maggie Award, *AC* also earned a **Silver Award** in the national **Magazine & Bookseller's Newsstand Cover Competition**, whose judges were impressed by our August 1998 *Saving Private Ryan* cover (below left). Not incidentally, both of the honored shots were taken by ace still photographer David James.

Martha and Alan's hard work has helped AC to maintain its status as the world's leading filmmakers' journal, and the rest of *AC's* staff would like to congratulate them for lending the magazine an extra dash of flair and panache!

monitor, took the actor out of the shot, and shot the chair alone. To blow out the bluescreen reflecting off the green vinyl chair, Adcock lit the chair with the 4K Xenon. Finally, he removed the chair from the set and replaced the actor, now perched on apple boxes, in the position outlined on the monitor. The resulting match-cut dissolve shifts the parody into a mood of stark seriousness.

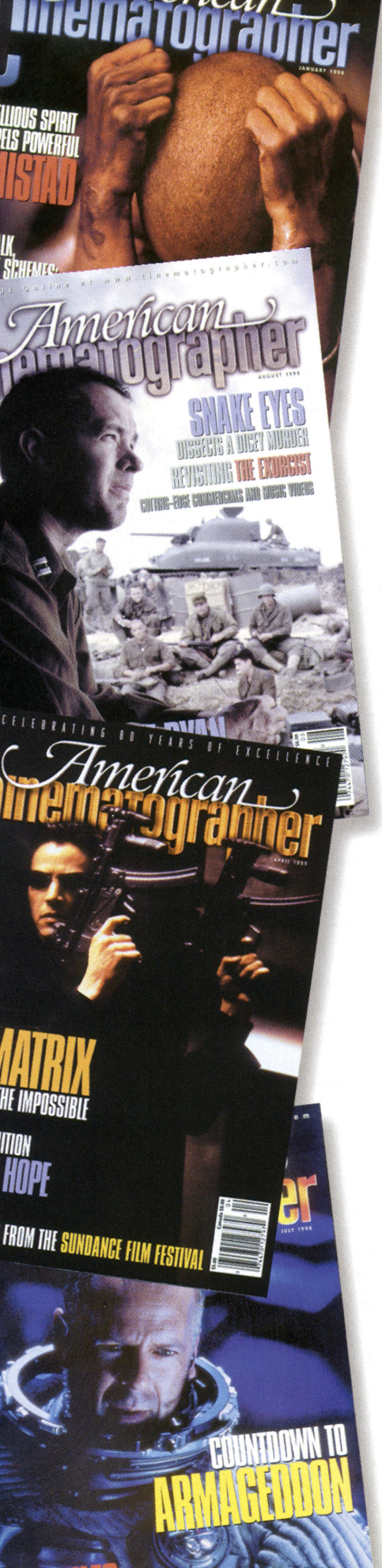
To facilitate the effects work for this image, Mark Larranaga of Digital Domain, who doubled as the visual effects supervisor, wanted the footage shot at ⅓ over key. Naturally, attention to detail was essential in assembling the shot, but Larranaga and Goldsmith took it to an extreme, digitally erasing every piece of cash that fell in front of the actor's face. The chemotherapy fluids, which consisted of basic white saline solution on set, were colored a construction orange in post, as was the fluid running up the actor's IV.

Even the spotlights shown in the PSA were digital. "It would have taken us forever on set to set up a whole bunch of spotlights that would read on top of the bluescreen," Goldsmith explains. Larranaga and Goldsmith used fog and smoke elements to fill the room with smoke, and then added spotlights through it. The final color correction tied the whole scene together, placing the actor in a smoke-filled void.

Once the shoot was over, the donations kept coming. Fotokem developed the film, Digital Magic provided the film-to-video transfer, Todd-AO offered sound work, and AD Music and APM kicked in the score. Goldsmith edited the bulk of the PSA himself on an Avid at Diva Post.

If you haven't seen "Cancer Cash" on CBS, Fox, UPN or Comedy Central, you can download the PSA, the script and the storyboards at www.unlikely.com. ■

If you have a commercial or music video production that you would like to submit for the Short Takes column, send a VHS copy of the spot, all pertinent contact and credits information, and artwork to AC *senior editor David E. Williams at 1782 N. Orange Dr., Hollywood, CA, 90028.*



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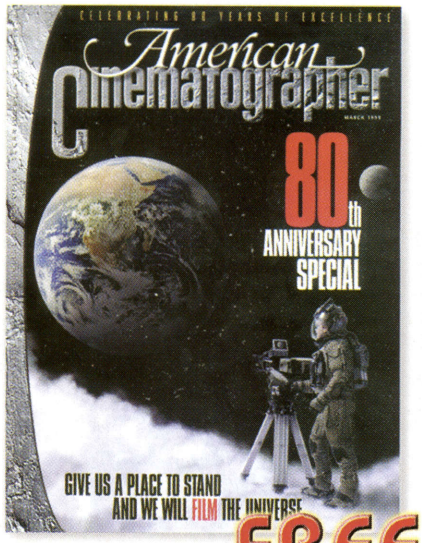

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New Products & Services

compiled by Andrew O. Thompson and Chris Cooling

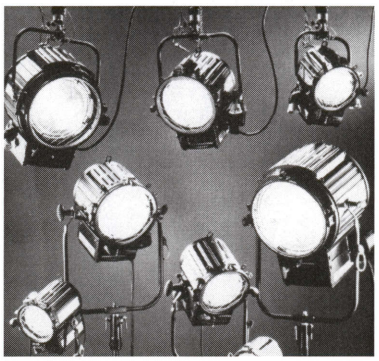
Margarita Mix Opens Doors

Margarita Mix de Santa Mónica recently inaugurated its Los Angeles facility with a festive Cinco de Mayo celebration. The firm's new space features four sound-mixing suites and one pre-lay transfer room, all networked with dSP 32 Track Postations. The rooms — dubbed Amada (Beloved), Bella (Beautiful), Concepcion (Conception) and Dulce (Sweet) — all offer premier mixing services. Each suite includes a customized VO booth and a Postation, a new digital audio production system from Digital Studio Processing (dSP) of New South Wales, Australia. Having installed this fully networked system, the company is serving as a flagship facility for dSP.

Acoustical architects Studio bau:ton, interior designer Margot Alofsin and the company's management and engineering teams collaborated to transform what was once an antique store into an audio facility with the atmosphere of a Mexican resort. The studios surround an open-air courtyard that features Old World fountains and cactus gardens reminiscent of a Mexican plaza.

Prior to the opening, the company recently completed such commercial projects as Gap's "Khaki Soul" and "Khaki Swing" spots, Jeep Wranglers' "Lost," and Lexus's "High-Bank Track."

Margarita Mix de Santa Mónica, (310) 396-3333, fax (310) 396-9633.



Strand Luminaires

Strand Lighting introduces its new comprehensive line of lamps designed to accommodate both studio and location lighting. The Strand Quartz color line integrates both HMI daylight Fresnels and daylight Pars, along with studio and bambino tungsten Fresnels. These 22 fixtures come in two distinct body styles: either a small, die-cast aluminum design or a larger, stainless-steel build with aluminum extrusions and die-cast components. The range of daylight Fresnels includes HMIs in the following sizes: 200W, 400W, 575W, 1.2K, 2.5K, 4K and 6K. The daylight range also encompasses 200W, 575W, 1.2K, 4/2.5K and 12/6K Par lamps. The tungsten units feature three full-size studio fixtures (1K, 2K and 5K Fresnels) as well as seven more compact units (200W, 500W, 1K, 2K, 5K and 10K).

A number of time- and cost-saving features are included with the line. For example, common hardware, parts and accessories are used throughout the range, thereby necessitating fewer spare and accessory parts. Handle and adjustment placement is also standardized, further simplifying use. Larger heads offer front and back focusing through pole operation. The focus system for the new line is maintenance-free, as it employs a high-quality worm gear.

The lights are all IP20 factory-rated, CE-approved, and UL- and cUL-listed. High-specification electronic ballasts (from 200W to 12K) are now offered in addition to Strand's original range of compact magnetic ballasts (575W to 12K). The system's durability is ensured by its use of corrosion-resistant aluminum, stainless and scratch-resistant steel.

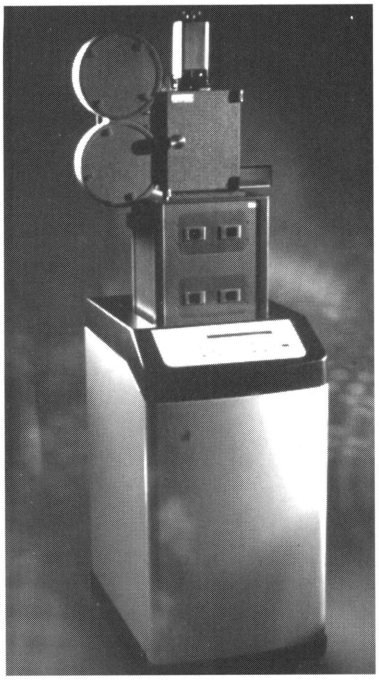
Safety features include spring-loaded top catches for retention of accessories, bonding eyes and rigging hooks. The system also includes on-off pushbuttons for the HMIs and Pars. Optional flight cases for the protection of Par lenses and lighting kits during transport are also available.

Strand Lighting, (310) 637-7500, fax (310) 632-5519, website: www.strandlighting.com.

Improved Film Recorder

Management Graphics, Inc. recently unveiled improvements to their Solitaire Cine V CRT-based image recorder, which affects the device's quality, speed and ease-of-use.

The Cine V can work with various film formats, including 35mm Cine/Academy, 35mm VistaVision, 65mm and 4" x 5". Imaging speeds range from 12 seconds at 2K resolution to 23



seconds at 4K on Kodak EXR 5245 for 35mm Cine/Academy formats. Densities range from Kodak test wedge Step 19 at 2K to Step 21 at 4K. For even greater resolution, users can select 8K, which offers 8,192 x 5,464 pixels per frame.

The Cine V also offers users the flexibility to image to Kodak's 5244 intermediate film, a capability that benefits a range of special effects. Imaging speed to 5244 film varies depending on the desired density setting.

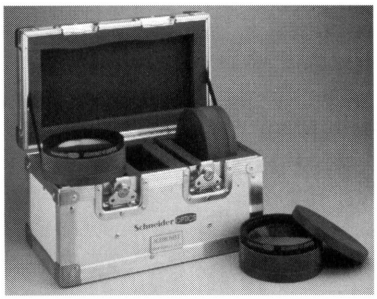
On every frame, enhanced electronic controls automatically adjust imaging, to ensure that the focus in each frame corner is as sharp as at the image center. The Cine V also features digital geometry control for clarity and 36-bit color depth. Enhanced fog-reduction technology also improves the device's output, while software licensed from Quantel enhances the dynamic range on 35mm Cine/Academy and 65mm films.

New menus, and the Cine V's large LCD screen, offer greater amounts of information to the operator, and the machine also features an extensive self-diagnostic program at start-up.

Management Graphics, (612) 854-1220, fax (612) 851-6159, e-mail: cine-info@mgi.com, website: www.mgi.com

Schneider 138mm Achromat Diopters

Schneider announces its new line of two-element 138mm Achromat Diopters, which allow for close-focusing with zoom or prime lenses. When attached to a primary lens, the diopters act as a "close-up" lens — thus, the camera can achieve larger images when focusing close to a subject, while also achieving sharp detail with smaller subjects. Designed specifically for improved color and contrast performance, they also correct the distortion typically encountered with single-element diopters. Sharpness is maintained across the axis, and can be held throughout a zoom lens's range. The diopters are available singly or in sets of three; each has a molded rubber gripping

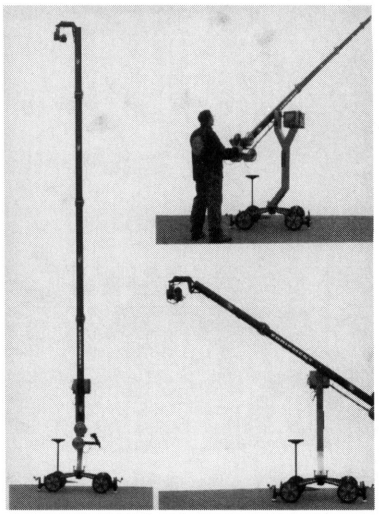


surface and comes with front and rear lens caps.

Schneider Optics, Inc., (516) 761-5000, fax (516) 761-5090, website: www.schneideroptics.com

Crane/Mast System

Egripment's new MiniScanner is notable for its function both as a professional crane and a completely vertical mast. The system is designed to be versatile across many uses, including sports broadcasts. The MiniScanner's complete assembly can be rotated 360 degrees and can extend to height settings of 14', 20.5', or 27.5'. The arm is constructed of lightweight aluminum and features a built-in parallel bar system. Its maximum platform load is 17.5 lbs, which makes the MiniScanner fully compatible with the Egripment Mini Shot Remote Head and various three-chip CCD cameras. The MiniScanner also features a number of electronics and

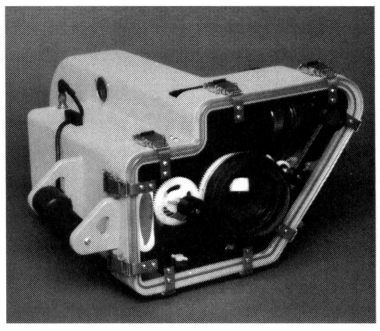


controls for pan, tilt, zoom and focus, including speed, reversal, electronic dampening and roll movement. Its accompanying dolly is equipped with brakes and leveling jacks. The complete MiniScanner kit is compact and quick to set up, allowing for mobility in on-location shooting.

Egripment Support Systems, (818) 787-4295, fax (818) 787-6195.

Splash Housing

Photo-Sonics introduces a new splash housing for the company's 35mm 4ML Reflexed camera. Able to run at frame rates ranging from 10 to 200 fps, the camera system is designed to increase the photographer's options when capturing sequences both on and under water. Designed by Emmy Award-winning cinematographer Dan Merkel, the handholdable system's flexibility complements the shooting of complex special effects scenes and high-adrenaline water action. This flexibility is further supported by the availability of domed or flat lens ports. The 4ML system



uses Nikkor lenses between 18mm and 85mm, and employs a Nikon mount. The housing is operational up to depths of 15'. The unit's total weight is approximately 45 lbs. including lens, camera and film.

Photo-Sonics, (818) 531-3240, fax (818) 531-3258, e-mail: rental@photosonics.com, website: www.photosonics.com

Kodak Launches ScreenCheck

The General Cinema theater chain recently inaugurated the Kodak ScreenCheck Experience quality-control system at its Avco Theater in Westwood, California. (The program was initially announced in New Products *AC* Nov. '98.)

The ScreenCheck Experience system is several layers deep, and includes approximately 250 separate evaluation points. During the first stage, a Kodak team works with cinema managers to evaluate image quality on their screens. Problems are diagnosed and resolved. Most screens can be quickly brought up to standard with relatively inexpensive adjustments in projection equipment and maintenance procedures. Screens will be periodically recertified to ensure public confidence. Kodak also provides ongoing training for projectionists to ensure proper maintenance. After a screen is certified, exhibitors can use distinctive signage, a trailer and other promotions to inform moviegoers.

Kodak has announced plans to certify some 150 theatres in Los Angeles, Seattle and Boston during the coming months. The ScreenCheck program will begin internationally in the near future, in such countries as Australia, England and Japan. Says Richard Aschman, president of Kodak's Professional Motion Imaging department, "It's important for audiences to experience movies the way they are meant to be seen. It's a more immersive experience when bright and sharp images are projected on big screens with clear lines of sight. This enables audiences to see subtle details in contrast, colors and textures that are part of the story. They can feel the danger concealed in the shadows, and see a glint in a character's eyes that reveals his or her mood."

Industry standards specified by SMPTE and embraced by the National Association of Theater Owners recommend 16 footlamberts of brightness at the center of the screen and 12 at the edges. Past surveys have indicated that the average screen in the U.S. measures at about half of the recommended brightness.

For more information, call the ScreenCheck Hotline at (310) 204-7143, or contact your local Eastman Kodak representative.

Mavica Digital Cameras

Sony now offers three new models of its Mavica digital camera: the MVC-FD73, MVC-FD83 and MVC-FD88. The latter model represents a significant increase in picture quality at 1.3 million pixels, and features a range of resolution options, including Super XGA (1280 x 960), XGA (1024 x 768) and VGA (680 x 480). The MVC-FD88 also includes an 8x optical/16x Precision Digital Zoom lens with auto macro function. The MVC-FD83 offers interpolated mega-pixel technology for increased digital enhancement (1216 x 912). This 17 percent increase in image size results in a 1 million pixel image for viewing or printing.

Both the MVC-FD83 and MVC-FD88 feature 4x floppy disk drives and A/V out connectivity. This enables television playback of images and MPEG movies, as well as JPEG still images. The two models also offer MPEG movie mode, which can capture up to 60 seconds of motion video and audio, and Voice Memo mode, which allows for narration of still images. The MVC-FD83 and MVC-FD88 also offer High-Speed Scan Auto Focus, Precision Digital Zoom, two slow shutter speeds, and four pre-programmed special effects.

The most affordable unit is the MVC-FD73, which features a 10x optical zoom, a 2x floppy disk drive, e-mail mode and a 2.5" LCD screen. All Mavica models operate with standard 3.5" floppy disks; depending on the features selected, the user is able to store up to 40 JPEG images on a single disk.

The MVC-FD91 features the longest optical zoom lens currently available in a digital still camera (14x). It also includes Super SteadyShot image stabilization (which minimizes camera movement even when using the telephoto option), a color viewfinder, a manual focus ring, and a tilting 2.5" LCD.

Furthermore, all Mavica cameras include photo manipulation software that allows users to edit images on their home computer. ArcSoft PhotoStudio software is provided with the MVC-FD73, MVC-FD83 and MVC-FD88 models; the MVC-FD91 includes MGI PhotoSuite software.

Sony, (800) 222-SONY, website: www.sony.com.

Digital Projection's 8,000-Lumen Projector

Digital Projection's new all-digital Power 8gv projector is available for immediate worldwide delivery. Operating at 8,000 peak lumens (7,500 ANSI), the 8gv is based on Texas Instruments' Digital Light Processing (DLP) image-modulation technology. The optical components traditionally featured in the company's projectors have been optimized to generate increased light output. Accessories include an integrated light shutter, a hard-wired remote adapter, a PalmPilot control system, and PC control software for improved offscreen image adjustment. This latest projector incorporates 1024 x 768 (XGA) native resolution, and is able to reproduce images from sources as high as 1280 x 1024 (SXGA). The perceived resolution of the 8gv system has also been enhanced by increasing the "on to off"

Doing Research?

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Amistad,; Jackie Brown; Hard Rain; Documentaries: *4 Little Girls, A Midwife's Tale, Sick;* Albert Maysles; *Bride of Frankenstein* (1935)

February
Kundun; Kemper, ASC Lifetime Achievement Award; *Sphere; Desperate Measures; Oscar and Lucinda; The Red Shoes* (1948)

March
The Spanish Prisoner; Francis, BSC International Award; *Afterglow; Kitchen Party; Shopping for Fangs; Men with Guns;* Rockport Film and Television Workshops; *Captain from Castile* (1948)

April
Lost in Space; Lost in Space effects; Previsualization systems; *From Earth to the Moon; The Newton Boys; Always Outnumbered;* Sundance '98; Torun festival

May
Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas; Everest; ASC Television Awards; U2 video; *Ma Vie En Rose* effects; Post houses; *Caught* (1949)

June
Bulworth; Print Dailies; *Godzilla; The Truman Show;* ASC Feature Awards; *A Town Has Turned to Dust;* South by Southwest festival

July
Armageddon; Armageddon effects; *The X-Files; The X-Files* effects; *Brooklyn South;* L.A. Indie film fest; *In a Lonely Place* (1947)

August
Saving Private Ryan; Snake Eyes; Floria Sigismondi; Gerald Casle; Nike commercial; *The Exorcist* (1973)

September
Without Limits; Love is the Devil; Ralph Lauren commercial; Post; Fuel; *Touch of Evil* (1958)

October
Ronin; Rounders; Law & Order; Buddy Faro; Emmys; *A Soldier's Daughter Never Cries*

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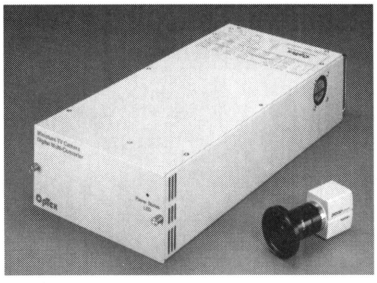
contrast ratio to 450:1.

Digital Projection, (770)420-1350, fax (770)420-1360, website: www.digitalprojection.com

Digital Multiconverter for Mini-TV Cameras

OpTex introduces a portable system for aspect ratio conversion for those who work with miniature television cameras. Through a single converter board, cameras with a serial digital output of 4:3, for example, are now easily adjusted to 16:9 widescreen. Other forms of output, such as composite, or

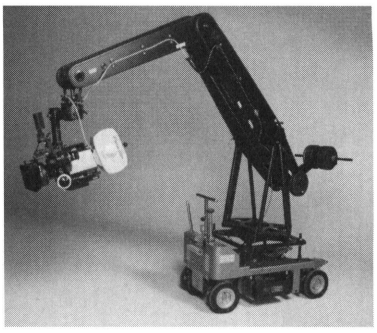


YUV/RGBS, are also covered through the system's inclusion of appropriate coder and decoder boards. All boards are compatible with 625 and 525 TV lines, and the system offers, as options, both synchronizing and test generator boards. The device consists of a power supply unit, whose status is indicated via a front-panel LED, and contains space to accommodate up to four converter boards. It is powered by 12-30v DC, or 110-240v AC 50/60 Hz.

OpTex, 44-181-441-2199, fax 44-181-449-3646, website: www.optex int.com.

K-Hill's New Z-Jib Agents

Panavision Chicago and Panavision Florida are new additions to K-Hill, Inc.'s family of Z-Jib agents, bringing the total to four, alongside Panavision Tokyo and Panavision U.K. Intending to broaden the international location options for shooting with the Z-Jib arm, Ken Hill, the company president, was personally on hand to set up the agencies over the winter. As detailed in the March '99 issue of *AC* (see coverage on *Carlo's Wake*), Hill's Z-Jib (formerly



known as the Zero Gravity Boom Arm) is available in three sizes, and was designed to accommodate a range of diverse uses. The Z-Jib comes in 6', 8' and 11' heights. Hill's company also designs and manufactures custom mechanical equipment for the film industry.

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Points East

Silvercup Forges Ahead With Expansion

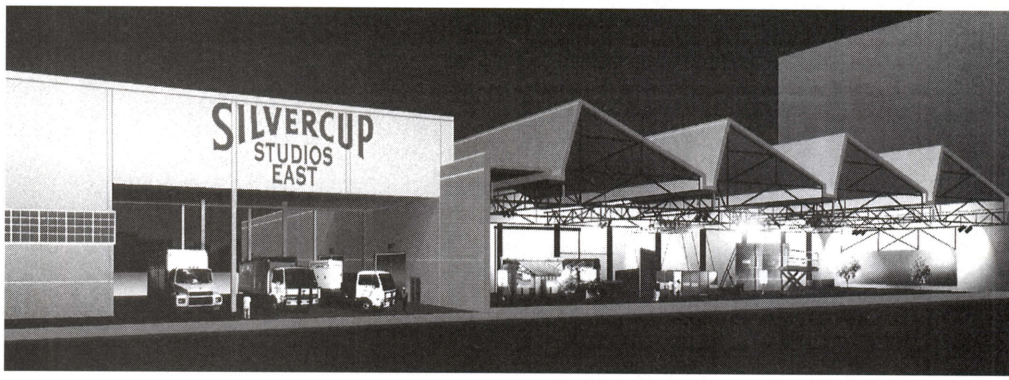
by Eric Rudolph

Oscar winner Robert De Niro, Miramax head honcho Harvey Weinstein and New York mayor Rudolph Guiliani made national news recently when they announced a tentative deal to build a $150 million, 700,000-square-foot Hollywood-style film production center at the Brooklyn Navy Yard, an abandoned New York City shipyard that gained international prominence during World War II.

The notion of summer blockbusters filming on the Brooklyn waterfront, as well as the location's stirring views and the principals' combined star power, certainly lent the announcement some perceived heft. However, the reality is that the deal is far from being a certainty. Millions of dollars in financing has yet to be secured, and there have been reports of squabbling between the various parties involved in the project. According to the *New York Times,* the press conference was preceded by emergency weekend meetings at the Mayor's Gracie Mansion residence, where the behind-the-scenes players addressed various issues, such as the amount of rent the studio facility would be charged.

According to insiders, alternative plans for this same site, as well as other areas of the New York metro area, have gone the way of the wind lately — thanks to some intense, old-fashioned political turf battles, hard-nosed dealmaking, and numbers that just don't add up. All parties have readily acknowledged that the Navy Yard studio facility, if built, is still years from fruition.

Meanwhile, much closer to midtown Manhattan, a well-established motion picture and television studio facility is about to open a second group of large studios that would collectively comprise the largest motion picture production facility in New York City.



This digital illustration shows the design of Silvercup Studios' new facility.

Silvercup Studios' CEO Alan Suna says that the new $20 million Silvercup Studios East is well along in the construction of a complex of five 16,000-square-foot, 28' high stages located a few miles southeast of Silvercup's present location, just across from Manhattan in Queens. Some of the new stages may be functioning by mid-summer, and the entire facility should be ready before fall.

Silvercup Studios, whose huge red sign at the Queens end of the 59th Street Bridge is familiar to anyone who's headed out of Manhattan via that popular route over the past 15 years, took over the old Silvercup bread bakery (which lies nearly underneath the bridge a mile due east of Manhattan's Upper East Side Gold Coast) in 1983. In fact, a prominent asset of the present Silvercup location is its proximity to the 59th Street bridge; almost the instant one exits the bridge in Queens, Silvercup's doorstep beckons.

The huge bakery was converted into a 250,000-square-foot production facility with 13 mostly long and fairly narrow studios. The largest room is 18,000 square feet, and is configured in a more conventional square layout. Silvercup has served as home to such feature films as *When Harry Met Sally, The Purple Rose of Cairo, The Impostors, Ransom,* Howard Stern's *Private Parts* and *Great Expectations*, among others.

Silvercup currently boasts the hit HBO mob saga *The Sopranos* (Points East, *AC* October '98) as a tenant. The facility's largest stage houses the interior set of the Soprano family's suburban subdivision mansion. The enormously popular hour-long "dramedy" will introduce additional Soprano family members in its second season, which begins airing in January of 2000; to accommodate these new characters' haunts, Silvercup will add a third 6,000-square-foot stage to the show's current 18,000- and 16,000-square-foot stage allotments.

Silvercup Studios East, with its five new studios, will alleviate some of the pressure on the current space. The combined gross space at the two Silvercup locations will be 450,000 square feet, which Suna asserts will comprise the largest motion picture production facility in New York City.

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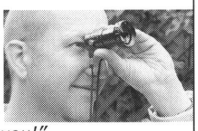

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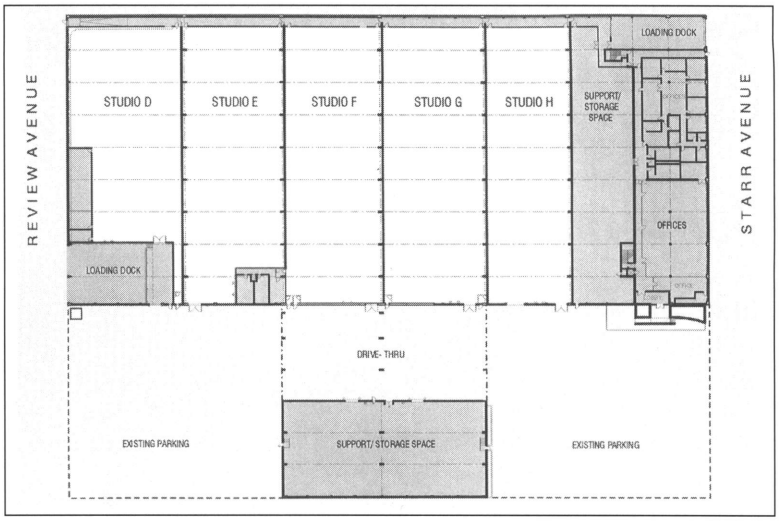

A look at Silvercup East's floor plan

the time, the numbers say you can't build motion picture studios in New York City," Suna explains. "The upfront costs of building from the ground up are high, and when you're done, no one commits to using the space more than a week or a month in advance — and even then, it's only a commitment of a few months or a year or less. It is very difficult to find major financing based on such a model."

Both of Silvercup's facilities started with existing structures, which kept the initial costs down. Additionally, because the movie studios' financial models do not work for the big lenders, Suna runs his operations on a real-estate model, meaning that the renovated buildings alone are worth close to the amount borrowed. "We're able to build studios because we pick good, solid structures to begin with that cost less to upgrade and have substantial value by themselves," Suna notes. "Our total costs are probably 60 percent of what it would cost to build something new, so we're not over-leveraged."

Suna adds that since Silvercup is an established studio facility, he only needs to hire a half-dozen new employees to open Silvercup East. "The overhead is about the same, but I'm stretching it over greater inventory," he notes, apologizing for sounding like a number-cruncher.

In the case of the new facility, the purchase price of $8 million was reasonable, and the quality and appropriateness of the structure was such that the cost of renovations was a relatively modest $12 million.

The new studio complex is located about 20 blocks southeast of the present Silvercup, in an industrial area of Queens not far from the Midtown Tunnel to Manhattan. The building was originally built in 1936 as a steel plant that was later converted to concrete manufacture. The self-contained, gated Silvercup East will include 12,000 square feet of shop space, 25,000 square feet of office space, and extensive set, prop and wardrobe staging areas.

Rumors have long abounded that Kaufman Astoria Studios, located farther north in Queens, will also be expanding. The busy six-stage production facility dates back to the silent-film era, and sprang back to life in the 1980s. Kaufman Astoria's largest stage is currently occupied for half of each year by the set for the CBS hit *Cosby*. (Ironically enough, much of the 26,040-square-foot Stage E houses a re-creation of an exterior block of the studio's actual neighborhood, where the *Cosby* show is set.) Recent films shot at Kaufman Astoria since its re-opening in the early Eighties include *Scent of a Woman, Ransom* (part of which was shot at Silvercup) and most of Woody Allen's films.

At press time, however, no expansion plans for the facility had actually been announced, nor was there a timetable for such an announcement. ■

Books in Review

by George Turner

Mary Pickford Rediscovered
by Kevin Brownlow
Abrams, 236 pps., casebound, $39.95
ISBN 0-8109-4374-3

When British film historian and producer Kevin Brownlow writes about the silent film era, you can bank on the result being tops in its field. And if Robert Cushman, photo curator at the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, selects the 232 stills used in such a work, you know they'll be real eye-openers. Last but not least, when the resulting volume is published by Abrams, specialists in fine-art books, you can be assured that it will be an aesthetically satisfying table-topper. *Mary Pickford Rediscovered,* a Brownlow-Cushman-Abrams collaboration, is just such a tome, and it's everything one could hope for in an artistic biography.

Pickford was the most celebrated star of her time, a top producer and studio executive and one of the most influential figures in the industry. In 1915, she founded the Mary Pickford Company, and along with her equally brilliant husband, Douglas Fairbanks, she established the Pickford-Fairbanks Studio on Sunset Boulevard (which still exists, minus the backlot, as Warner Hollywood Studio). Pickford also co-founded United Artists with Fairbanks, Charlie Chaplin and D.W. Griffith. Above all, she was an outstanding actress, who at the age of 33 could portray Little Lord Fauntleroy *and* his mother successfully in the same picture!

Brownlow's book abounds with rare and marvelous behind-the-scenes photos featuring a slew of near-forgotten figures: Walter Miller, Frank Borzage, Johnny Harron, Henry Walthall, David Belasco, James Kirkwood, Marshall Neilan, ZaSu Pitts, William Desmond Taylor, Fred Thomson and Johnny Mack Brown, to mention just a few. ASC members are well-represented by Charles Rosher, Karl Struss, Hal Mohr, L. W. O'Connell, and Ray June.

Incidentally, Pickford was the first producer to put the initials ASC on the screen, in 1919. She once told Brownlow, "There is something to me so sacred about that camera."

The Red Rooster Scare
by Richard Abel
University of California Press, 320 pps. cloth ($50), paper ($24.95)
ISBN 0-520-21203-7

Believe it or not, during the first decade of this century — and for the only time in history — American theaters were dominated by movies from France. The image most often seen on the American screen was that of a live rooster crowing silently — the trademark of Pathé Freres, which for years was the largest and most powerful motion picture company in the world. When color came into vogue with the introduction of Pathé's patented process, the rooster turned bright red. Other French companies, such as Méliès Star Film and Gaumont, also played roles in the rapidly growing industry, but Pathé was clearly the leader in quality, quantity and popularity.

The company certainly wasn't reticent about saying so, either. In one ad, the rooster crowed with impeccable French hauteur: "There are two different

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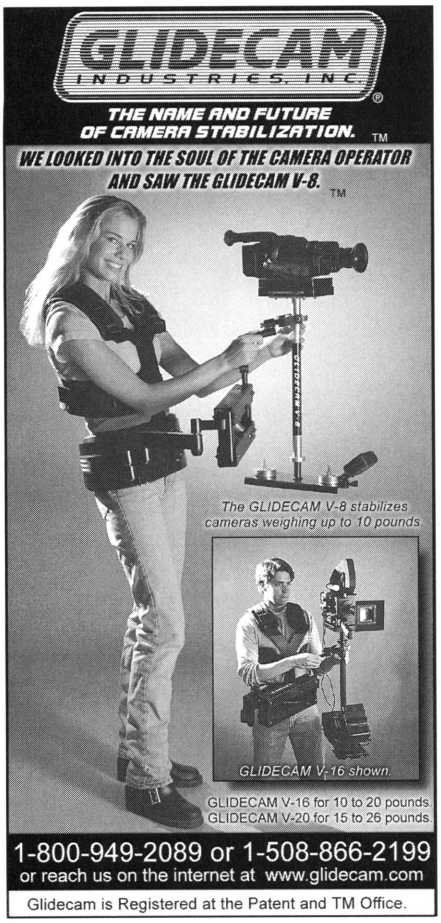

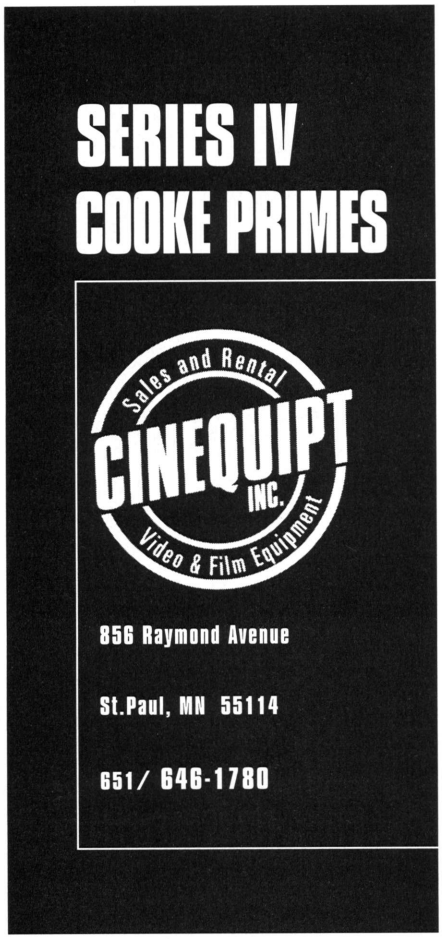

kinds of moving picture theaters. The good ones use pictures with the well-known little red rooster. The bad ones do not. Do not waste your money on a bad show."

Richard Abel, NEH Professor of English at Drake University, has written several previous volumes on the history of French cinema, and he has a knack for providing new slants. In this instance, he is less concerned with artistry than with market dominance and its ramifications. During Pathé's rule, American filmmakers came to regard the foreign product as a dangerous invasion that simply had to be curbed. Citing a desire to nationalize the industry, they succeeded in practically excluding French films from American screens. Several years before the outbreak of World War I, the French presence in the American film world had deteriorated enormously.

The ideas presented in this book are provocative, the text makes for good reading, and the many vintage ads are a pleasure to peruse. One drawback is the scholarly use of footnotes. In academic circles, it's standard procedure to flip back and forth to footnotes, but this can be a bit taxing on the layman, particular since such annotations comprise about one-third of *Red Rooster Scare.* Here's a footnote for University presses: What would be wrong with relocating these notes into the body text when distributing such books outside your institutions' ivy-covered walls?

Vixens, Floozies and Molls
by Hans J. Wollstein
McFarland, 284 pps., casebound, $45
ISBN 07864-0565

It's fascinating to recall supporting players from movies of the late 1920s and early 1930s, and to catch their acts at film festivals or on television. Back in the day, the star names *above* the title were the lures that brought throngs of fans to theaters. Today, of course, one might look at *Sunrise* and admit to being more impressed by the villainess, Margaret Livingston, than the star, Janet Gaynor. Is it possible that the male stars of all those Thirties dramas and romantic comedies *really* preferred the top-billed femmes to Gail Patrick, Dorothy Revier, Helen Vinson or Claire Dodd?

Wollstein, a Danish actor and writer, pays tribute to 28 of these sultry screen sirens with biographical essays, filmographies and photos. The featured "backstreet beauties" include Mary Duncan, Olga Baclanova, Evelyn Brent, Noel Francis, Anna May Wong, Lilyan Tashman, Vivienne Osborn, Ona Munson and a score of others. These dangerously alluring ladies hailed from various places and achieved varying degrees of success or failure. Aside from being hopelessly pigeonholed by the studios, and thus cheated of stardom, most had little in common, although it is noted that several were rumored to be romantically linked with Greta Garbo, Marlene Dietrich, Alla Nazimova and/or Leni Riefenstahl.

In the interests of accuracy, your humble reviewer should note that the book contains a number of gaffes. Captions misidentify Bernadene Hayes as Mae Clarke and Ethelreda Leopold as Hayes in *Great Guy,* and William Boyd as Irving Pichel in *Murder by the Clock;* Borrah Minevich's Harmonica Rascals are referred to as "accordion players"; in *Out of Singapore,* Dorothy Burgess, not Miriam Seegar, played "the meatier role of Concha" instead of "the captain's placid daughter" (who *was* portrayed by Seegar), and Montagu Love was not the captain, but his murderer; and in *Man of Conquest,* Gail Patrick doesn't have "a few scenes as a woman who briefly dallies with Sam Houston" — that was Joan Fontaine (Patrick became Mrs. Houston, First Lady of the Republic of Texas).

Quibbles aside, nostalgia and heart-tugs await the readers of these tributes. It's good to see these talented ladies getting the attention they so richly deserve. ■

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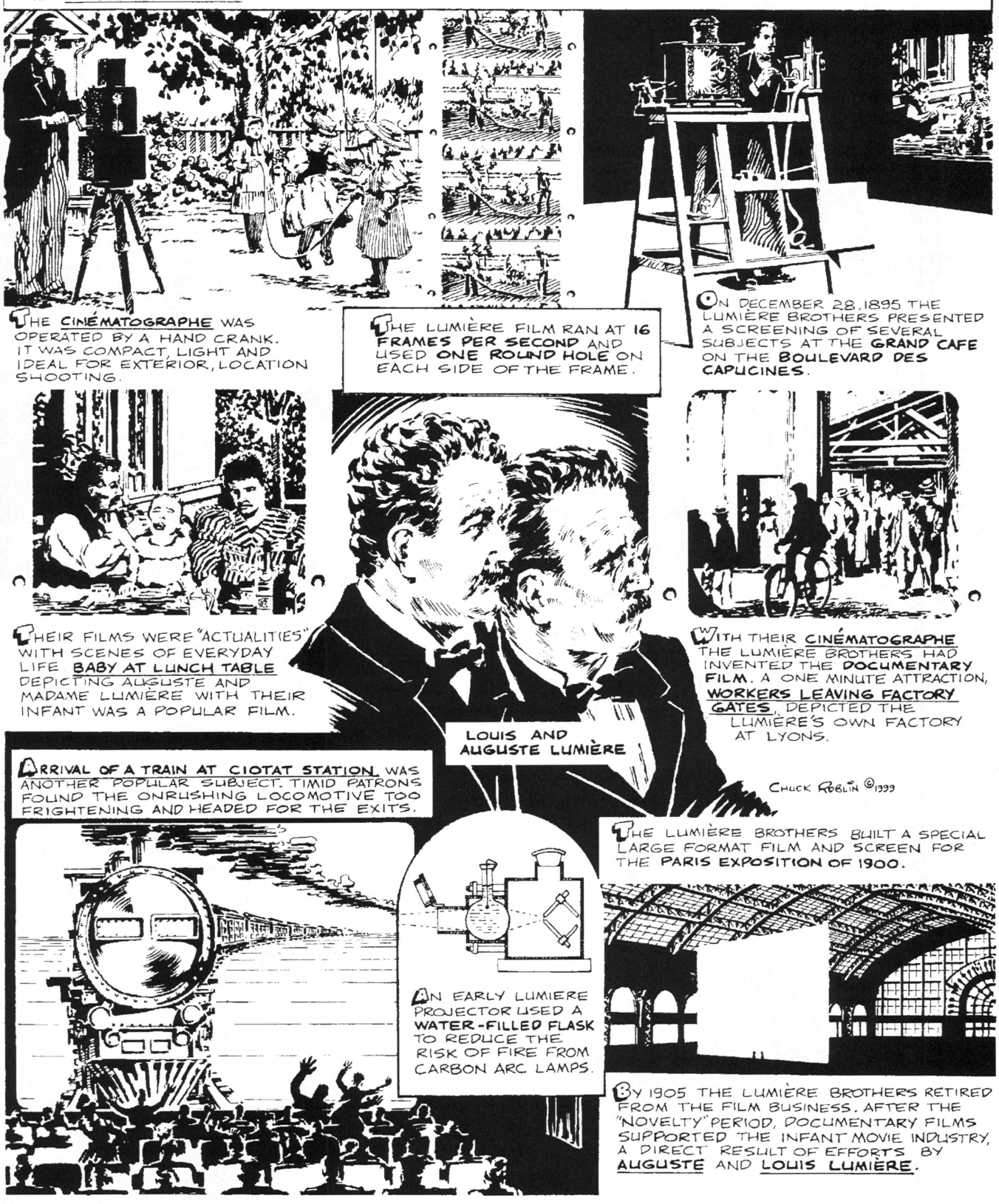

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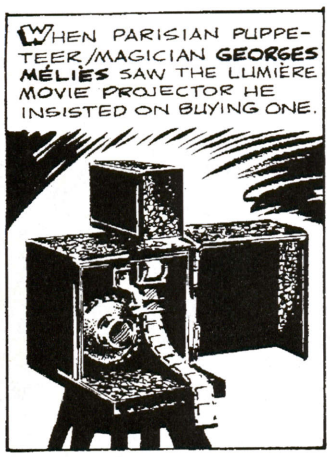

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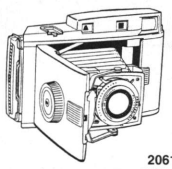
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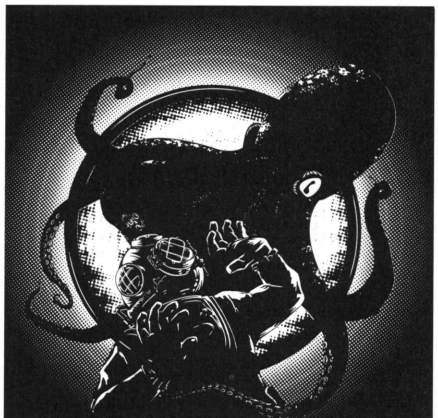
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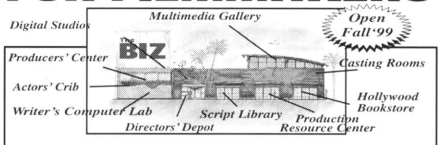

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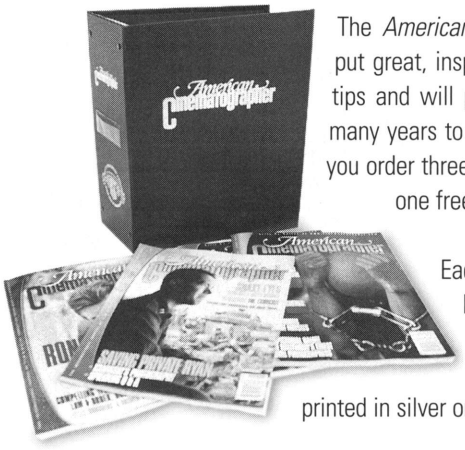

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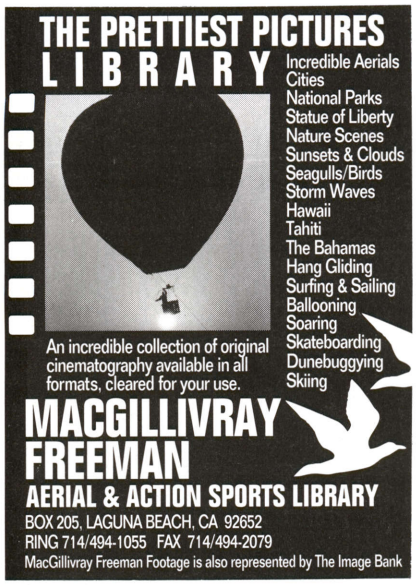

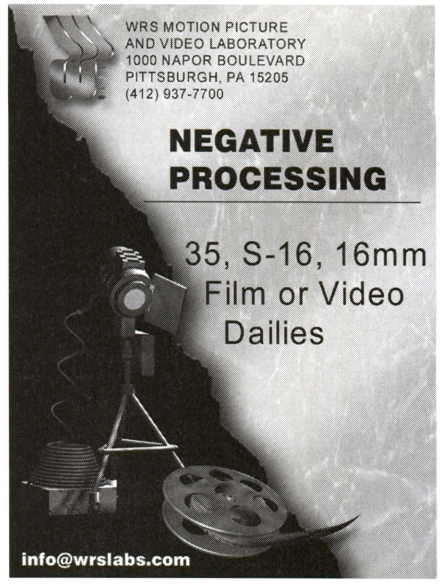

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Advertiser's Index

A&J Cases 32
AC 2, 59, 75, 85, 89, 109, 110, 114, 125
Arriflex 41

Backstage Equipment 101
Balloon Lights 122
Band Pro Film 53
BeachTek 124
Benjamin Centoducati 121
Birns & Sawyer 15, 117
Bogen Photo 101, 107
Boston Camera 32
Burrell Enterprise 124

Camera Essentials 124
Camware 124
Century Precision 95, 117, 125
Chambless 123
Chapman/Leonard 105
Chesapeake 101
Chimera 124
Cine Radio 12
Cine South 121
Cine Video Tech 28
Cinema Engineering 122
Cinema Products C-2
Cinema Viewer 82
Cinematography Electronics 93
Cinequipt 118
Cineric 126
Clairmont Hollywood 34-35
Clamp Flag 122
Columbia College 95
Cool-Lux 89
Coptervision 4

Doggicam 52
DTC 121
Du All Camera 122

Eagle Systems 123
Eastman Kodak 19
Energy Film 122
Eurocrew 126

Film Emporium 125
Film/Video 93
Fish Films 123
Flying-Cam/Moving-Cam 16
Foto-Kem 17
Four Designs 122
Fries Engineering 107
Fuji C-3

Glidecam Industries 118
Greg Hensley 124
Hollywood Film 125
Hydroflex, Inc. 121

IBC 65
Ikonographics/Image G 83
Int'l Cinema 123
Int'l Film & TV 28
Isaia & Company 13, 116

JNS Company 123

K & H Products 91
K5600 6
Kenworthy 73
Kino Flo 47
Kish Optics 64

Labofilms 125
Lee Utterbach 16
LentEquip 123
Lightline 82
LightTools 30
Lightning Strikes/Optech 84
London Int'l 93
LTM Corp. 81

MacGillivray-Freeman 126
Magic Gadgets 121
Mamiya American 21
Mazilview 116
Military Combat 124
Miller Fluid Heads 45
Mole Richardson 29
Movie Tech 46
Musco Mobile 10
Music Video 125

New York Film 27

O'Connor Engineering 63
Oppenheimer Camera 62
Otto Nemez Int'l 23

P.E.D. Denz 31
Panavision Corporate 5
Panavision Hollywood 1
Panther GmbH 24
Photokinesis 126
Plus 8 Video 57
Porta Jib 26

RGB Color Lab 121
Rip-Tie Co. 124

Schneider Lenses 24
Select Image 124
Showbiz East 71
SIGGRAPH 51
Sim Video 91
SL Cine 123
SMS Productions 124
Softlights 102
Sony Electronics 8-9, 11
Spacecam 25
Stanton Video 81, 121
Ste-Man 43
Super 8 Sound 73

Tiffen Optical C-4
Tobin Cinema 121
Transvideo Int'l. 76
Tyler Camera 6

Vancouver Film 14
VFG/PLC/Formatt 7, 61
Videosmith 123
Visual Products 77

Whitehosue A/V 124
Widescreen Software 126
Willy's Widgets 123
WRS Motion Picture 126

ZGC, Inc. 22, 26, 33, 64, 69, 102, 123

From the Clubhouse

SOC Honors ASC Members

The Society of Operating Cameramen (SOC) gave its 1999 Presidents Award to Dean Cundey, ASC whose body of work includes *Halloween*, *Escape from New York*, *Romancing the Stone*, *Jurassic Park*, and the *Back to the Future* trilogy. Cundey also earned an Academy Award nomination for *Who Framed Roger Rabbit?*, and ASC Award nominations for *Hook* and *Apollo 13*. Says Cundey, "It means a lot to me to receive this award from SOC, because I know firsthand that no one understands, appreciates or is more supportive of the creative role played by cinematographers better than camera operators. There are no great or even good cinematographers without talented camera operators on their crew."

For the second consecutive year, the SOC honored an historical shot from a film that's made a memorable impression on the public. This year's selection was the bravura opening crane shot from Orson Welles' *Touch of Evil* (see *AC*, Sept. '98). Operating for cinematographer Russell Metty, ASC was camera operator Phil Lathrop, ASC. His widow, Betty Jo Lathrop, received the award, which was presented by actor Charlton Heston, the star of the 1958 classic.

Lathrop recalled that Welles wanted the audience perched on the edges of their seats while watching this tense scene, praying that a car bomb wouldn't explode while Heston and co-star Janet Leigh were nearby. The vehicle finally pulled away, and as soon as it was out of sight, there was a huge blast. Years later, Lathrop offered the following insights on that sequence: "It was a great lesson in how to use the camera to build unbearable tension. It would be a simple shot today, but it took us the entire night to light and shoot that scene, and it was worth every minute of that time."

After *Touch of Evil*, Lathrop went on to become a successful cinematographer in his own right, and shot such pictures as *The Americanization of Emily*, *Earthquake*, *Lonely are the Brave* and *Days of Wine and Roses*. ■

Filmmakers' Forum continued from page 128

which the old joke describes as a horse designed by committee. The image somehow loses its 'focus,' if you'll pardon the pun. It takes the original intent to carry through with the meaning of an image or series of images. People are getting hip to this — certainly, directors are — and they're requesting more and more involvement from directors of photography."

John Alonzo adds, "There's no doubt that economics have always governed a large part of what we do. A common example now is this: if you're shooting a feature and the studio says you can't have print dailies, do you refuse the job? Of course not. You figure out the best way to get your dailies in the electronic or digital format, and then test until you're sure about what you'll ultimately see onscreen, in whatever form it's to be delivered. No one else is capable of doing that. On that level alone, the cinematographer's imperative — the absolute need to control the image throughout the entire process — is greater today than it's ever been."

One of the most enjoyable things about watching movies — the good ones, at least — is that feeling of losing yourself in the story, forgetting the moment and just allowing yourself to be carried away. As for the cinematographer's contribution, this is the result of an intangible factor that the naysayers seem to conveniently forget. "What's really important here above all is communication — the way we deal with the director in terms of interpreting the script, and our relationship with the actors," says Poster. "There's also the need to deal with a budget and schedule. It takes a tremendous amount of skill to balance all of that pressure and still do something artistic."

Daviau agrees. "A lot of people fail to understand that making a film has a lot to do with relationships. The key thing is the ability to read a script and actually start to see the film early on. Technology is always a part of this, but it isn't the deciding factor. Directors want to work with people who deliver to the film the visual concept it demands. And that is always accomplished in a way very similar to what was going on at the turn of the last century."

John Alonzo put it even more succinctly: "As long as the lines of communication are open, there is nothing to fear."

So, with that big ugly robot and all of his lock-stepped followers cut down to size, cinematographers everywhere should be champing at the bit for a crack at what's around the corner. "Absolutely," Poster agrees. "We're not going to see the death of film, but of course, digital imaging is in our future. We're going to have to retrain some and retool a bit, too. That's just the inevitability of progress. Should this scare anyone? No, not at all. Because as directors of photography, we will always have the taste, talents, knowledge and management skills to tell a story with images, run a set and to create a space for ourselves within the authorship of motion pictures and television."

Leon Shamroy would be proud. ■

Richard Crudo is a Los Angeles-based director of photography. His credits include Federal Hill, American Buffalo, Music From Another Room, Outside Providence *and* American Pie.

Filmmakers' Forum

The More Things Change...

by Richard Crudo

We've heard the same message from a variety of sources for years now, delivered in a tone of certainty, devoid of irony: "Film is dead. The microchip is ascendant. A laptop will soon replace the Panaflex and the cybersuite will be the new soundstage." The only thing missing has been the robot emissary's command: "Cinematographers of Earth, obey or die!" Sentiments like this can make the faithful shudder when one considers how quickly digital technology has come to the fore, and that's precisely where this annoying hubris comes from. What's more disturbing is the snide, underlying implication that if we don't start visualizing our images in textures similar to that of the evening news, we'll soon find ourselves going the way of the blacksmith or the Model T.

Well, I'm sorry, Klaatu, but that's nonsense. The cinematographer's role is indeed changing as we hurtle toward the year 2000, but it is not ending. Contrary to what some may think, the art form of cinematography and those who practice it are more vital than ever and will continue to be, regardless of any developments the future may bring. "Technology is independent of the artistry involved in creating images for motion pictures," states ASC vice president Steven Poster. "I've often said, 'Give a great director of photography a box Brownie and he or she is going to make wonderful pictures.' It doesn't matter what we shoot on; we're going to make fitting and artistic choices to tell a story."

John A. Alonzo, ASC took this notion a step further. "The future exists in the here and now. When new ways of applying ourselves to what we do become available — whatever they might be — it's very exciting, and we'd be foolish not to take advantage of the best of them."

Supporting both men is a long history in which the opportunity for creative growth has expanded as the tools of the trade evolved. Take Leon Shamroy, ASC, for example. Beginning in 1927, he served as a director of photography for 47 years, during which time he shot over 130 features. His resumé covers every genre imaginable and boasts four Academy Awards among an astounding 18 nominations. Additionally, he acted as a teacher and mentor to countless others who later went on to careers as outstanding cinematographers in their own right.

Since Shamroy was a pillar of the notoriously conservative studio establishment, it wouldn't be hard to imagine him playing it close to the vest in his work. The reality was quite the opposite — openness to change was a consistent hallmark of his career. He dealt with the advance from silents to talkies, black-and-white to color stocks, prime lenses to zooms, spherical to anamorphic formats and theatrical exhibition to television origination, and his willingness to embrace new methods set the standard for his time. That he did so as a member of an elite group, while working from a personal aesthetic developed before the first World War, speaks to us in a special way, particularly at this moment. It proves that the cinematographer's eye — our sum total of knowledge, experience and taste — is a timeless element that can never be replaced or marginalized. Without it, there's only movement mistaken for progress and an obsession with hardware, which in itself is a meaningless pursuit.

While this may sound good on paper, there remains a creeping paranoia in some corners that the rules have shifted — that in today's climate, too much eagerness to adapt may result in an erosion of the director of photography's position as author of the image. Allen Daviau, ASC puts those misconceptions to rest. "We've all worked with video assist for years, and everybody knows that's not the final movie," he says. "What we'll have when using digital cameras will be groups of people around a monitor on a set, each with their own opinion: 'Oh, gee, I didn't think it would be so dark back there,' and so on. Well, that's been said in dailies since the time of Thomas Edison, and cinematographers have always understood that. Also, we've trained ourselves to respond to looking at the scene we've lit directly or through a ground glass, but either way we are previsualizing what the film stock and processing — that particular technology — will do to the image. This is a tremendous responsibility that's been there from day one. Only a cinematographer has the knowledge and talent to do that, and we will continue to do it, regardless of the emulsion we're using — even a digital one."

Postproduction has traditionally offered its own set of challenges to directors of photography who want to maintain control of their work. It's bad enough to be busy shooting on some faraway location when an earlier project's final color timing or telecine session is taking place back home, but now the potential for unapproved alteration of the image is often just a keystroke away at any point in the finishing process. However, this does not mean that the cinematographer's input is not wanted. Speaking from experience, Steven Poster reveals, "At an increasing rate, I'm being asked to consult on every project I do far into post, far into the digital aspect of these jobs. People are realizing — not only producers, but the digital folks themselves — that to have the original eye of the artist involved with the image makes much more sense than to go it alone. When you get multiple people trying to affect the same thing, you end up with something like a camel,

Filmmakers' Forum continued on page 127

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